

The Bible in Full Color: A High School Bible Study on the Inductive Bible Study Method

Margaret Gregory

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Chris Hulshof, Ed.D.
Thesis Chair

Derik Idol, Ed.D.
Committee Member

James H. Nutter, D.A.
Honors Director

Date

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Abstract

Modern Christianity is saturated with Bible studies for students. However, a crucial skill the Christian student needs to learn – how to study the Bible independently – is a topic difficult to find in contemporary youth Bible study curricula. While there is a wealth of biblically sound, helpful Bible studies that students can benefit from, it is essential that students do not remain dependent on these resources. One goal for youth ministry leaders is that their students graduate high school with the knowledge and tools they need to interpret the Scriptures for themselves correctly. The creative thesis will be an inductive Bible study curriculum for high school students that will equip students to explore the riches of God's Word.

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Overview of the Inductive Method

Inductive Bible study is a hermeneutical method that provides the user with “a task-oriented, step-by-step process”¹ for studying the Scriptures. The three basic steps are observation, interpretation, and application. The observation step focuses on understanding what the text says. As professors Richard Fuhr and Andreas Köstenberger write in their textbook, *Inductive Bible Study*, “observation seeks to establish a foundational knowledge of what the text is saying and to discern those issues that may warrant focused study. Good observation is by nature inquisitive and will result in the right questions being asked of the text.”² There is a to-do list of tasks to complete in the observation stage, including comparing translations, identifying important words and key relationships in the text, identifying the narrative structure, and asking questions of the text.³ Good observation is the foundation of the inductive method upon which interpretation and application are built.

The second step of the inductive method is interpretation, which focuses on understanding what the text means. “Interpretation seeks to understand the meaning of the text at its exegetical level, that is, what the text was intended to convey by its original author to his original audience.”⁴ Interpretation is accomplished by analyzing the historical, literary, and theological contexts of the passage, identifying significant themes and motifs, and referencing

¹ Al Fuhr and Andreas J. Köstenberger, *Inductive Bible Study* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2016), 20.

² Fuhr, *Inductive Bible Study*, 39.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid., 40.

scholarly materials and Bible study tools that help illuminate the passage.⁵ Most, if not all, of all the reader's questions formulated in the observation step can be answered in the interpretation step when done faithfully. It is through proper observation and interpretation that the correct application can be identified.

The last step of the inductive method is application, and the goal of this step is to identify how the text is to be applied to the reader's life that reflects the original author's intent. Because the modern reader is very different to the original audience, "application is more involved than simply putting knowledge into practice. Application must evaluate *how* an interpreted text is best appropriated."⁶ This is done by evaluating how the text is to be applied to the church and to the individual, and demonstrating how that application is reflected in the whole of Scripture.⁷ After the hard work of inductive Bible study is done, the believer can then faithfully apply what they learn to their life and walk with God.

Biblical Interpretation: A Brief History

While the inductive Bible study method is the standard approach to studying the Bible, it did not come to be in a vacuum, unaffected by history. Therefore, it is critical to explore the history of biblical interpretation to understand better how the interpretive approaches used throughout history evolved over time. By taking a brief, broad, and inexhaustive survey of the history of biblical interpretation, one can more clearly understand how the interpretative method came into existence and popularity.

⁵ Fuhr, *Inductive Bible Study*, 40.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 41.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 41-42.

Judaic Interpretation of Scripture

Biblical interpretation begins with Judaism. God commanded His leaders to regularly read the Scriptures out loud for the people (Deuteronomy 31:9-13).⁸ Even before the canon was fully established, Jewish scholars had devised methods by which they interpreted the sacred Scriptures, the most sacred and authoritative text being the Pentateuch.⁹

The method by which Jewish scholars interpreted the Old Testament Scriptures is known as the *midrash*, which comes from the Hebrew word *darash*, which means “to seek.”¹⁰ There are two types of *midrash*: the *midrash halakhah*, and the *midrash haggadah*.¹¹ *Midrash halakhah* “consists of formulating rules of conduct,”¹² while *midrash haggadah* “elaborates on the stories of the Bible to bring out the points the teller considers important for the understanding of the text and of life.”¹³ Additionally, there were forms of *midrash* that focused on allegory, which comments “on the text of Scripture but actually [focuses] on another, more spiritual subject matter.”¹⁴ Scholar Gerald Bray writes that allegorical interpretation was used to “draw out the ‘deeper meaning’ of the text, to explain its obscurities and difficulties, and to apply it to the

⁸ Gregg R. Allison, *Historical Theology: An Introduction to Christian Doctrine*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), 163.

⁹ Henry, Wansbrough, *Use and Abuse of the Bible: A Brief History of Biblical Interpretation*, (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2013), 1.

¹⁰ Wansbrough, *Use and Abuse*, 1.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 2.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ Allison, *Historical Theology*, 163.

contemporary situation.”¹⁵ With allegory, little consideration was taken regarding the literal, historical events described in a text.¹⁶ Even from the beginning of biblical interpretation, there existed a tension between the grammatical-historical approach used in the inductive method and the allegorical approach, which continued to be a popular method throughout the early church.¹⁷

New Testament and Early Church Interpretation of Scripture

Understanding Jewish interpretation methods informs how the Old Testament is interpreted in the New Testament. Jesus incorporated both methods in His teachings.¹⁸ His famous Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7) primarily uses *midrash halakhoth*, while His parables primarily use *midrash haggadah*. Jesus also used typology in His teachings on the Old Testament. Allison defines typology as “a method that underscored the correspondence between what had gone on earlier in the Old Testament (called the *type*) and something in his own day (called the *antitype*).”¹⁹ The New Testament writers also incorporated typology into their writing. In Romans 5:12-21, Adam is presented as a type of Christ, “the two representing all of humanity.”²⁰ The New Testament writers would also make frequent references and allusions to the Old Testament Scriptures. Paul, a former Pharisee trained under Gamaliel (Acts 22:3), had a “highly sophisticated” use of Scripture, “showing both an impressive degree of skill and an

¹⁵ Gerald Bray, *Biblical Interpretation: Past and Present*, (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 1996), 57.

¹⁶ Allison, *Historical Theology*, 163.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ Wansbrough, *Use and Abuse*, 2.

¹⁹ Allison, *Historical Theology*, 163.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

effectively honed argument.”²¹ His references to Old Testament Scripture are most frequently seen in his letters to the Romans, Corinthians, and Galatians, and he would use Scripture to point to Jesus Christ and the gospel.²²

One early church father, Irenaeus, would champion the Christological interpretation of Old Testament Scripture, whose liberal approach to this method of typological interpretation was borderline allegorical, if not outright so.²³ However, Irenaeus was among the first to attempt an interpretation of Scripture that was wholly Christian, instead of solely Judaic.²⁴ Irenaeus’ interpretive strength, as authors Stephen and Martin Westerholm point out, is that “from a Christian perspective he clearly got the “big picture” right: the God of the Old Testament is the God of Jesus Christ.”²⁵ Additionally, Irenaeus was also known for developing the rule of faith, which was the insistence that “Scripture must be interpreted within the tradition of the Church.”²⁶ While the use of Christological typology has grown more conservative, Irenaeus was effective in developing and popularizing this method.

The early church continued to use typological interpretation, but the allegorical approach would also rise in popularity. There were two main schools of thought during this time with differing approaches to biblical interpretation. The first school was the school of Alexandria, led

²¹ Wansbrough, *Use and Abuse*, 6.

²² *Ibid.*, 7.

²³ Stephen Westerholm, and Martin Westerholm, *Reading Sacred Scripture: Voices from the History of Biblical Interpretation*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016) 49-50.

²⁴ Westerholm, *Reading Sacred Scripture*, 57-58.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 52.

²⁶ Wansbrough, *Use and Abuse*, 30.

by Clement and then by Origen, who would popularize the allegorical method.²⁷ Origen was the first to write extensively on biblical hermeneutics, and he is often “regarded as both the first and the greatest Christian biblical scholar of the ancient world.”²⁸ Even though he appreciated the literal approach to Scripture, Origen “dismissed the idea that all of Scripture can be taken literally and emphasized its hidden meaning.”²⁹ He would even go as far as to argue “that much in Scripture seems unprofitable”³⁰ when only the literal approach is used. Like Irenaeus, Origen made significant progress in the development of biblical hermeneutics, even if his approach would be considered unorthodox today.

The second school was the school of Antioch, and its interpretative method was a blend of typology and literal interpretation.³¹ One characteristic of the school of Antioch was its strong opposition to the allegorical approach.³² One prominent figure from the school of Antioch was John Chrysostom, who held the belief that “the plain meaning of the biblical text, as understood and intended by its (human) authors, is the medium of divine revelation and should be the focus of interpretation.”³³ This belief is also the basis of the inductive Bible study method. As such,

²⁷ Allison, *Historical Theology*, 163.

²⁸ Westerholm, *Reading Sacred Scriptures*, 61.

²⁹ Allison, *Historical Theology*, 164.

³⁰ Westerholm, *Reading Sacred Scriptures*, 69.

³¹ Allison, *Historical Theology*, 165.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ Westerholm, *Reading Sacred Scriptures*, 93.

Chrysostom's preaching reflected this hermeneutical belief,³⁴ and parallels that of many modern expository preachers.

Medieval Interpretation of Scripture

The early church approach to Scripture has a large influence on the medieval perspective, especially regarding the "multiple-sense approach"³⁵ to Scripture. An early major character in the medieval period of the development of hermeneutics was Gregory the Great, who helped to establish the multi-faceted approach to biblical interpretation that was popular during this time.³⁶ He devised a threefold strategy that examined the literal meaning, the allegorical interpretation, and the practical application of the text.³⁷ A fourth category, anagogy, would later be added, which "refers to sayings about future rewards and life in heaven, either openly... or figuratively."³⁸ This fourfold approach to Scriptural interpretation would be developed and popularized by the Venerable Bede and Thomas Aquinas.³⁹

Thomas Aquinas is notable for having been taught at the university and becoming one of the first biblical studies professors in a European university,⁴⁰ an establishment that was a fairly recent invention (Oxford was founded in the 1170s, and Aquinas was born around 1225).⁴¹

³⁴ Westerholm, *Reading Sacred Scriptures*, 94.

³⁵ Allison, *Historical Theology*, 169.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ Wansbrough, *Use and Abuse*, 70.

³⁹ Allison, *Historical Theology*, 169-170.

⁴⁰ Westerholm, *Reading Sacred Scripture*, 136.

⁴¹ Wansbrough, *Use and Abuse*, 84-85.

While Aquinas did use the fourfold approach to Scripture, he believed the literal sense to be the superior and the foundation from which the spiritual sense was derived.⁴² This was most clearly seen in his commentary on the book of Job, which focuses solely on the literal interpretation of the text, as opposed to Gregory the Great's commentary, which focused "on the 'mystical' elements."⁴³

The fourfold approach was not universal, however. While some would neglect the literal interpretation in preference to the mystical interpretations, scholars like Hugh of St. Victor, Andrew of St. Victor, and Nicholas of Lyra, emphasized the literal interpretation of Scripture, whether alongside the mystical interpretations or as the sole interpretative method.⁴⁴ Many of these scholars were influenced by Jewish interpreters, sometimes to the point that they discarded the messianic interpretation of passages traditionally understood to be messianic, such as Isaiah 53.⁴⁵ Reliance on patristic (early church) interpretation of Scripture also grew in popularity which gave room for the Catholic Church to grow in its interpretative authority.⁴⁶

Reformation Interpretation of Scripture

When Martin Luther nailed his ninety-five theses to the door of a Wittenberg church in late October 1517, the Reformation swiftly began. With the Reformation causing a split between the traditional Catholic Church and the reformed Protestant movement, this period also led to a

⁴² Wansbrough, *Use and Abuse*, 86-87.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 86.

⁴⁴ Allison, *Historical Theology*, 170-171.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 171.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 172-173.

split in the interpretation of Scripture. The first major figure in the Reformation was Martin Luther, who, while trained in the allegorical method as a Catholic priest, began the Reformation movement partially based on an “insistence” to interpret the Bible solely based on its literal, grammatical, and historical meaning.⁴⁷ The inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture were highly emphasized, and tradition was viewed as “subservient” to God’s Word.⁴⁸ It was Luther’s firm belief that Scripture is clear and does not hide what the reader is meant to know by means of allegory.⁴⁹ Luther’s interpretation was extremely Christocentric, to the point where he rejected the Epistle of James and had low esteem towards Jude and Revelation.⁵⁰ Despite rejecting allegory, Luther’s strong Christocentric ideology also lead him to embrace Christological typology.⁵¹ Luther was also among the first to emphasize the importance of literary context as well as distinguishing of law and gospel.⁵² He believed that Scripture could be divided into these two categories, with law representing “everything that God expects of us,”⁵³ and gospel representing “everything God has given or done for us.”⁵⁴ Using this line of logic, the Old Testament contains primarily law and the New Testament contains primarily gospel, but the Old

⁴⁷ Allison, *Historical Theology*, 173.

⁴⁸ Ben C. Blackwell, and R. L. Hatchett, *Engaging Theology: A Biblical, Historical, and Practical Introduction*, (Grand Rapids: HarperCollins Christian Publishing, 2019), 89.

⁴⁹ Westerholm, *Reading Sacred Scriptures*, 178.

⁵⁰ Wansbrough, *Use and Abuse*, 111.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² Allison, *Historical Theology*, 174.

⁵³ Westerholm, *Reading Sacred Scriptures*, 185.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

Testament also contains elements of gospel and the New Testament, elements of law.⁵⁵ Luther's work continues to have an impact, with many of his ideas making their way into the inductive Bible study method.

Another heavy hitter in the Reformation was John Calvin, who, like Luther, rejected allegorical interpretation in favor of embracing the literal approach to biblical interpretation.⁵⁶ Calvin championed simplicity in interpretation,⁵⁷ emphasizing the pursuit of the author's intent.⁵⁸ He also promoted three facets in the study of Scripture: one's personal attitude of humility and discernment towards the Scripture, the "internal ministry of the Holy Spirit to understand Scripture," and the teaching ministry of the local church as the "external ministry for comprehending His Word."⁵⁹ Calvin's ideas, particularly his push towards understanding the author's intent, are all features found in the inductive Bible study method.

In the post-Reformation period prior to the Enlightenment, there were a few individuals who were still hard at work carrying on the legacy of Luther and Calvin. Literal interpretation of Scripture became the Protestant norm, and the Holy Spirit's work in illuminating Scripture was especially emphasized.⁶⁰ Johann August Ernesti highlighted that "the specific way that the Holy Spirit spoke in the Scripture was by the inspired words of the text"⁶¹ as opposed to the things and

⁵⁵ Westerholm, *Reading Sacred Scriptures*, 185-186.

⁵⁶ Allison, *Historical Theology*, 175.

⁵⁷ Westerholm, *Reading Sacred Scriptures*, 207.

⁵⁸ Allison, *Historical Theology*, 175.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 176-177.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 177.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

events that Scripture records. Roman Catholics like Robert Bellarmine continued to emphasize the authority of church tradition in the interpretation of Scripture.⁶² As Protestant churches entered a slump, Philip Jacob Spener had a vision for renewal that centered on the return to the devotion to Scripture in the church and in daily Christian living.⁶³ Overall, the Reformation caused a lot of changes and developments in biblical hermeneutics, many of which are still in place today through the inductive Bible study method.

Modern Interpretation of Scripture

The Enlightenment, which began around 1650, completely rejected tradition in favor of the use of universal reason to interpret Scripture.⁶⁴ With this came the rise of several new, more liberal-leaning approaches to the study of Scripture. The first method was the historical-critical approach that rejected the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, interpreting Scripture “like just another book.”⁶⁵ This method of interpreting Scripture was accompanied by “the advent of deism, which rejects special revelation.”⁶⁶ Two early proponents of this method were A. B. Davidson and his successor William Robertson Smith, who authored the article on the Bible in the ninth edition of the *Encyclopedia Britannica*.⁶⁷ This critical approach would branch off into three interpretative categories: “source criticism, form criticism, and redaction criticism,”⁶⁸ all of which hold a low

⁶² Allison, *Historical Theology*, 178.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Blackwell, *Engaging Theology*, 89-90.

⁶⁵ Allison, *Historical Theology*, 179.

⁶⁶ Blackwell, *Engaging Theology*, 90.

⁶⁷ Allison, *Historical Theology*, 179.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 180.

confidence regarding both the inspiration and the authority of Scripture. The second interpretative method was the subjectivism, or the reader-response method, which proposed that each person had the right to “interpret Scripture as they saw fit.”⁶⁹ A third approach, supported by Charles Hodge, sought to apply the scientific method to the study of Scripture.⁷⁰ In response to these concerning interpretative movements, many evangelicals have sought to return to and promote the historical-grammatical approach as employed by the inductive method. One such attempt at this return was the creation and release of the *Chicago Statement on Biblical Hermeneutics* in 1982, which affirmed the historical-grammatical approach to interpreting Scripture.⁷¹ Additionally, many textbooks and resources were written during this time to promote this interpretative approach.⁷²

Postmodern Interpretation of Scripture

This current postmodern era of biblical interpretation is still in development, and much of it builds from the efforts of the previous era, but a few comments can be made regarding the developing changes. The reader-response method has increased in its pervasiveness and subjectivity, valuing “personal and communal experience”⁷³ over authorial intent, leading to a plurality of interpretations.⁷⁴ The interpretations of previously marginalized groups are especially

⁶⁹ Allison, *Historical Theology*, 179-180.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 180.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 182.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 182-184.

⁷³ Blackwell, *Engaging Theology*, 90.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

highlighted, and conflicting interpretations are not seen as problematic since interpretations are based on the individual experience.⁷⁵ Postmodernism also rejects metanarratives, biblical or otherwise, adding an additional challenge to biblical interpretation.⁷⁶ However, the postmodern era also boasts the greatest access to the greatest number of resources on all topics, including biblical interpretation. The challenge today is promoting the Scriptures not simply as a compelling story, but an invitation to join a wider, diverse, historical community.

Correlation to High School English Skills

While the concept of inductive Bible study may be unfamiliar to most high school students, most students will have learned or will be learning many of the skills used in inductive Bible study in their English classes. The Common Core Standards opens its chapter on reading skills with the following:

The Common Core standards expect students to read both widely and deeply. Students read across a variety of genres and time periods to develop cultural appreciation and insights into the human condition. At the same time, they read materials closely, thinking critically about the presented concepts and dissecting the author's execution of his or her craft.⁷⁷

The Bible contains books across many genres, written in different time periods to different cultures. Faithful Bible study requires taking literary and historical context into account.

⁷⁵ Blackwell, *Engaging Theology*, 90.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Susan Ryan and Dana Frazee, *Common Core Standards for High School English Language Arts: A Quick-Start Guide*, (Alexandria: Association for Supervision & Curriculum Development, 2012), 13.

Inductive Bible study also involves close reading of the text, which is also a skill expected of high school students. Many of the standards that high school students are expected to learn regarding reading literature are also similar to skills used in the inductive Bible study method. Students are expected to analyze “what the text says explicitly,”⁷⁸ “determine two or more central themes or central ideas of a text and analyze their development,”⁷⁹ and “provide an objective summary of the text,”⁸⁰ among other skills, which are all done during the inductive Bible study process. The curriculum will help students take those critical thinking and textual analysis skills they learn in the classroom and apply them to studying the Bible.

Understanding the Gap in Teen-Oriented Inductive Bible Study Literature

In a very saturated market, one might wonder how this curriculum would be different from the hundreds of existing curriculums currently available. However, Bible study curriculums written specifically for high school students on inductive Bible study are quite rare. Kay Arthur’s Precept Ministries has a wealth of inductive Bible study resources, but almost all are written with an adult audience in mind. While high school students can benefit from Precept studies, most would benefit more from a study tailored to their age and stage in life. Precept curriculum has been made for middle/high school students,⁸¹ but these studies focus on incorporating the inductive Bible study method into studying a specific book of the Bible. Additionally, Precept Ministries teaches a specific system of annotation that, while beneficial, can lead students to

⁷⁸ Ryan, *Common Core Standards*, 16.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 14.

⁸⁰ Ryan, *Common Core Standards*, 14.

⁸¹ Precept Ministries International. Series: *Inductive Bible Study Curriculum*. Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers.

become dependent on the system and the resources of Precept Ministries. One of the goals of creating this curriculum is that students would not need to be dependent on the writings of others to interpret Scripture. Instead, the desired outcome is that students would be solely dependent on the Holy Spirit in their study of Scripture, viewing commentaries and resources simply as tools to aid in study and research and not the means of interpretation.

Text Selection

The passage that the curriculum will focus on for teaching inductive Bible study is Mark 6:34-44.⁸² This passage has been intentionally chosen for several reasons. First, this passage is a biblical narrative, a genre that comprises the majority of the Bible. If high school students learn to interpret biblical narratives, a large portion of the Bible becomes much more accessible to personal study. Second, the miracle of the feeding of the 5000 is one of the few miracles found in all four Gospels. Students will compare and contrast the four related passages in context to sharpen their observation skills, to observe what each biblical author emphasized, and to show how different John's Gospel is from the Synoptic Gospels. Finally, the miracle of the feeding of the 5000 will likely be very familiar to most students who have grown up in the church. One of the secondary goals of the curriculum is that students will learn that there is always more to learn from even the most familiar of passages if one takes the time to study them.

Curriculum Objectives

The central goal for the curriculum is that high school students would learn, understand, and be able to implement inductive Bible study skills – with guidance first, and then on their

⁸² Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations will be from the *Christian Standard Bible*.

own. As students are learning inductive Bible study skills, they will also deepen their understanding of what the Bible is and why they should study it, clarifying misconceptions along the way and helping students create a course of action for studying the Bible. Other goals within biblical studies that students will achieve are learning how to interpret biblical narrative, learning how to find and use good-quality, age-appropriate commentaries, and learning how to compare parallel Bible passages, particularly from the Gospels. Students will also be improving their critical thinking and textual analysis skills. The overarching goal of the curriculum is that high school students would grow closer to Jesus Christ in spiritual maturity as they are taught how to study the Bible, while being exposed to the reality that there is greater depth to the “Sunday School stories” of their childhood.

A Note Regarding Formatting

In typical Bible studies, there are questions and prompts included that are given space on the page for readers to write their responses. Questions and other prompts intended for discussion or responses will be italicized to distinguish them from the informational text. Other than this one exception, the rest of the thesis will follow standard Turabian format, with footnotes included to demonstrate research.

Group Session 1: Welcome to The Bible!

Hello, friends! Welcome to the first week of this Bible study! Over the next several weeks, we will be journeying together as we learn how to study the Bible. Along the way, we will be studying Jesus' miracle of the feeding of the five thousand and its significance for our lives today over 2000 year later. Together, we will begin to see that the Bible is more than just black and white words on a page full of do's and don'ts, but a rich, colorful, true story about a real God who met with real people with real lives, real desires, and real hopes whose life events have much to teach about us about our God, His people, and ourselves. But before we can dive into learning how to study God's Word, we need to first know what it is.

Let's talk about what we already know.

Right now, what is your current experience with the Bible?

What do you know about the Bible and its story?

What are your favorite stories from the Bible?

What's something you wish you knew more about the Bible?

Some of you may have never opened a Bible before, some of you may be Bible trivia experts, and some of you are somewhere in between. The good news is that there are no prerequisites to studying God's Word, and there is always something more to learn from it no matter how much you know!

This week, we will be focusing on the story of the Bible and different characteristics of the Bible, particularly what makes the Bible unique from other books. We'll end this by introducing ourselves to the inductive Bible study method, which is the method of Bible study that we will be focusing on for the remainder of our time together.

Why is it important that we study the Bible as a whole before we begin studying its individual books/stories?

Let’s turn our Bibles to the Table of Contents and talk about how the Bible is structured. You’ll see that your Bible is broken up into two big sections – the Old Testament and the New Testament – and each section is comprised of many books.

What do you know about the Old Testament?

What do you know about the New Testament?

Together they comprise what is known as the biblical *canon*.⁸³ The Old Testament and New Testaments can be further broken down into sections based on genre and/or content. It may be helpful for you to mark out the following categories in your Bible for future reference.⁸⁴

Old Testament		New Testament	
Law	Genesis	Gospels	Matthew
	Exodus		Mark
	Leviticus		Luke
	Numbers		John
	Deuteronomy	History	Acts
Historical Books	Joshua	Paul’s Epistles (letters)	Romans
	Judges		1&2 Corinthians
	Ruth		Galatians
	1 & 2 Samuel		Ephesians
	1 & 2 Kings		Philippians
	1 & 2 Chronicles		Colossians
	Ezra		1 & 2 Thessalonians
	Nehemiah		1 & 2 Timothy
	Esther		Titus
Poetic/Wisdom Books	Job	General Epistles	Philemon
	Psalms		Hebrews
	Proverbs		James

⁸³ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 1994). 54.

⁸⁴ Partially adapted from Philip Johnston, *The IVP Introduction to the Bible*, (Westmont, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2011). 10-11.

	Ecclesiastes			1 & 2 Peter
	Song of Songs			1, 2, & 3 John
Prophetic Books	Isaiah			Jude
	Jeremiah		Apocalyptic	Revelation
	Lamentations			
	Ezekiel			
	Daniel			
	Hosea			
	Joel			
	Amos			
	Obadiah			
	Jonah			
	Micah			
	Nahum			
	Habakkuk			
	Zephaniah			
	Haggai			
	Zechariah			
Malachi				

What sections of the biblical canon are more familiar to you?

Which sections are less familiar to you?

Alongside these organizational divisions, the Bible is also comprised of different literary *genres*. Similar to how the books you read in English class are separated into genres such as biography, poetry, fantasy, or historical fiction, or how music can be sorted into genres such as pop, rock, country, or R&B, various biblical passages or whole books of the Bible can be labeled based on its structure and other distinctive characteristics. Just like book and music genres, biblical literary genres can get incredibly nuanced and specific, but we will focus on several main genres that can be found throughout Scripture.⁸⁵

⁸⁵ Krista Anyabwile, *Literarily*, (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2022). 26-28.

Law – The Law, also known as the Pentateuch or Torah, includes the first five books of the Old Testament – Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy – and outlines instructions for moral living, religious ceremonies, and civil matters. The Law is more than a rule book; it tells us who God is and how He seeks to dwell with His people.

Narrative – The majority of Scripture is comprised of narratives about God and His people. In the Old Testament, narrative is predominantly found in the Historical books (Joshua-Esther), but narrative also appears throughout Old Testament books of other genres, such as Genesis and Exodus of the Law books, Job of the poetry genre, and Jonah and Daniel in the prophetic books. In the New Testament, the Gospels and Acts are narrative texts. There are some differences between Old Testament and New Testament narrative, but they both feature the recording of events and interactions between people.

Prophecy – The books of prophecy (Isaiah-Malachi and Revelation) were written by men who were chosen by God to deliver a specific message to God’s people about future events. This genre is rich with symbolism, with some prophecies telling about the coming Messiah, some telling about the judgment and restoration of God’s people, and some, such as in Daniel and Revelation, telling about events that are to come at the end of the world.

Wisdom – The wisdom books (Job – Song of Songs) use predominantly poetry to explore themes such as suffering, worship, joy, doubt, practical living, love, and even depression! Each book has a unique way of showing us what life with God looks like.

Epistles – The Epistles are letters that were written from one church leader to another leader or to a whole church. Most of the Epistles were written by the apostle Paul, but Peter, John, James, and Jude also contributed various letters. These letters were written by these men

were written to give practical instruction about following Jesus, encourage believers, correct poor behavior, and give ministry updates.

Which genres are most familiar to you? Which ones are less familiar?

Which genres seem the most interesting to you?

Altogether, the Old and New Testaments are two parts of one larger narrative of redemption. The first two days of your personal study will go more in-depth into the biblical narrative (the central, overarching story of the Bible), but in short, the biblical narrative tells us about God, His people, what went wrong, what God is doing about it, and how we can be a part of it.

Whew! That was a lot of info! If you feel a little lost or overwhelmed, that's okay – we're all learning as we go along. But let's not miss the point – we're not learning all these facts about the Bible and its structure to win Bible trivia points. Rather, knowing how the Bible is structured will help us to understand it better, study it better, and ultimately, grow us into deeper relationship with our Creator. The Bible in front of you is a beautiful display of God's passionate grace, His deep love for you, and His desire for you to know Him. Let's dive in, shall we?

What are you looking forward to in this study? What are you nervous about?

End the group session with a time of prayer.

Week 1, Day 1: The Story of the Old Testament⁸⁶

They will be my people, and I will be their God. Jeremiah 32:38

Hi, friend! Welcome to the first day of personal devotion time in this study. Throughout each week, we'll explore more about what we talked about in the group session and practice what we learn. This week, we're looking at the *metanarrative* (overarching, big picture story) of the Bible and what makes the Bible unique. Today, we're looking at the metanarrative of the Old Testament.

What do you already know about the Old Testament? What parts of the feel less familiar?

The Garden – Relationship Established

The story of Scripture begins by introducing us to the main character – the self-existing, all-powerful, creative God. We see Him create everything in an orderly fashion: the heavens, the earth, light, sky, oceans & dry land, plants, the moon & stars, animals, and people. God makes the first people in His image to represent Him and to have a relationship with Him and one another. God places His people in the Garden & declares it all to be “very good” (Genesis 1:31).

Recommended reading: Genesis 1-2

The Rebellion – Relationship Broken

In the Garden, God had given only one command: do not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. While that command sounds simple enough, it did not take long for both Adam and Eve to rebel against God by eating the fruit of the tree after being tempted by the serpent. This sinful act by the first humans ushered in death and separation from their Creator,

⁸⁶ Vaughan Roberts. *God's Big Picture*, (Westmont: InterVarsity Press, 2003) was consulted for Day 1 and Day 2.

both spiritually and in their physical banishment from the Garden. However, God does not leave His people without hope or mercy. He sacrifices an animal to clothe Adam and Eve to cover their shame, and God promises that someone will come to crush the enemy.

Recommended reading: Genesis 3

The Patriarchs – Relationship Promised

The rest of Genesis follows God as He develops a relationship with one family, beginning with a name named Abram. God makes a *covenant* with Abram, promising land, a family line that will become a great nation, and a relationship with God who will bless and protect Abram and his descendants. As Abram's family tree grows, we see God keep His promises and maintain relationship with His people.

Recommended reading: Genesis 12:1-8

Exodus – A People in Transition

400 years later, Abraham's family has grown immensely, but they are enslaved to the Egyptian Pharaoh. Using Moses and a series of plagues, God delivers His people from their adversary, and the Israelites begin their journey to the Promised Land, being led by Moses and then Joshua. Once Israel has arrived at the Promised Land, they quickly forget the God who delivered them, begin living for themselves, and are led by judges who grow increasingly further from God and increasingly ineffective as leaders.

The Kings – A People in Rebellion

Over the next several hundred years, there would be many kings who would lead the nation of Israel. While Israel would remain one united nation under the strong, yet complicated

leadership of Saul, David, and Solomon, God's people would be divided into two nations – Israel & Judah – led largely by evil kings who had nothing to do with God. Very few kings were considered good and godly, and the people likewise descended into idolatry and rebellion. Through several prophets, God warns His people that judgment and exile would come if they chose to continue in their rebellion, but very few listened.

The Exile – Redemption Promised

After years of warning His people of the consequences of their continued rebellion, God lovingly disciplines His people by sending them into Babylonian exile. During this time, God continues to work His plan, using the prophets to tell His people that they will not be in exile forever, that they will return to the land, restore the temple, and worship God as they once did. Throughout the prophets, the promises of restoration in the short term are also interlaced with promises of a coming Messiah who will redeem His people once and for all. Restored back to Israel, the Jewish people began to wait on God's promised Messiah.

There is so much more we could talk about with the Old Testament story, but hopefully through this short summary you see that the Old Testament is not a daunting book of rules, but a “redemptive history”⁸⁷ of a holy, loving God who seeks to have a relationship with a people who routinely run away from the provision of their Creator. While the people of the Old Testament are different from us in many ways, there are also many similarities. God never stopped pursuing His people, despite their countless flaws and mistakes, and God never stops pursuing us.

End today's devotion in prayer, thanking God for the gift of the Old Testament and for His pursuing grace.

⁸⁷ John M. Frame, *Systematic Theology*, (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2013). 540.

Week 1, Day 2: The Story of the New Testament

The Word became flesh and dwelt among us. We observed His glory, the glory as the one and only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. John 1:14

Yesterday, we learned about the metanarrative of the Old Testament and God's promise to be with them and to provide a Savior Messiah who would redeem God's people. Between Malachi and Matthew was a period of 400 years of silence from God as Israel waited for the Messiah to come. 400 years later, at the exact right time, this Messiah arrived on the scene, but He was nothing like the Jews expected. Today, we will explore the metanarrative of the New Testament and the reality of Immanuel, God with us.

What do you already know about the New Testament? What parts are less familiar to you?

Jesus' Birth – An Unexpected Arrival

Instead of coming to earth as a mighty warrior, Jesus came to earth as a baby, the Creator dependent on His creation. Both Mary and Joseph, the parents of Jesus, faithfully accepted the call to care for and raise the Messiah, even though it meant hardship. The long-awaited Messiah was born in an animal stable, with the only fanfare given by angels to outcasted shepherds.

Recommended reading: John 1:1-18, Luke 2

Jesus' Life – An Unexpected Ministry

Thirty years later, Jesus began preaching and ministering around Galilee, assembling a ragtag group of disciples and healing the sick and disabled. Instead of being a political figure who would restore the nation of Israel, Jesus instead lives a countercultural life, exposing

religious hypocrisy, uplifting the outcasted, and calling for people to repent and begin a new way of life following Him.

Recommended reading: John 4

Jesus' Crucifixion – An Unexpected Victory

Jesus' message and way of life was offensive to those with religious power, and many wanted Him killed. However, this was no surprise to Jesus, who repeatedly predicted His own death and resurrection, knowing that it was necessary to bring about salvation for His people. After being brutally tortured for many hours, Jesus died on a wooden cross as payment for the sins of mankind, declaring "It is finished" before His final breath.

Recommended reading: John 19

Jesus' Resurrection – An Unexpected Return

Three days after His death, Jesus quietly resurrected and began appearing to His closest followers and to His disciples. By resurrecting from the grave, Jesus proved that He is the promised Messiah, that He accomplished salvation for His people, and that He was victorious over death. For the next 40 days, Jesus continued appearing to His followers and teaching them before ascending back into heaven.

Recommended reading: Matthew 28, 1 Corinthians 15

Pentecost and the Early Church – An Unexpected Movement

After Jesus' ascension, Jesus' followers gathered in the upper room waiting for the promised Holy Spirit to arrive. In a mighty display, the Holy Spirit entered the room and the hearts of these followers, marking the beginning of the church. On that same day, Peter preached

to several thousand Jews, 3000 of whom believed in the gospel of Jesus Christ. From then on, the church continued to grow through the power of the Holy Spirit, despite hardship and persecution. Soon after, an unexpected figure named Paul emerged. A former persecutor of these early Christians, Paul was confronted by Jesus. Paul would go on to become a missionary, spreading the Gospel to Gentiles all across the Mediterranean and writing letters to churches that would form a large portion of the New Testament.

Recommended reading: Acts 2

Revelation – An Expected Restoration

Near the end of his life, John, one of Jesus' disciples, received a vision from heaven of the events that will occur before, during, and after Jesus' return. While much of the book of Revelation can be difficult to understand, one thing is clear. Jesus will return to earth, and when He does, He will restore all things, put an end to suffering, and establish His reign on a new heaven and new earth where His people will live and enjoy Jesus for all eternity. For the believer experiencing hardship today, there is hope that there is a purpose and a future end to the suffering.

Recommended reading: Revelation 21-22

As we see in the New Testament, Jesus and His church turned the world upside down! Having this understanding of the metanarrative of Scripture will help you as you study God's Word by helping you place passages you study on this larger timeline.

End today's devotion in prayer, thanking God for giving us a record of Jesus' ministry and the early church, and ask the Holy Spirit to guide you as you study God's Word.

Week 1, Day 3: What Makes the Bible Unique?

All Scripture is inspired by God and is profitable for teaching, for rebuking, for correcting, for training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work. 2 Timothy 3:16-17

Hi friend! I hope you enjoyed looking at the big-picture story of the Bible the past few days. Today we're going to talk about what makes the Bible different from other books and why that's significant. Understanding the Bible's uniqueness comes from knowing these characteristics: Inspired, Inerrant, Infallible, Clear, Necessary, Sufficient, and Authority.

When a movie is "inspired by true events," what does that mean?

Unlike when a movie is loosely based on real life, the word inspiration means something different when applied to Scripture. *Inspiration* refers to the "supernatural influence of the Holy Spirit on the Scripture writers that rendered their writings an accurate record of the revelation or that resulted in what they wrote actually being the Word of God."⁸⁸ Anyone can write about God, but only the Scripture authors wrote what God said.

Why is it important that Scripture is inspired? What would change if Scripture wasn't inspired?

Inerrancy means that "everything [Scripture] asserts is true"⁸⁹ and contains no errors.

Infallibility is a stronger word meaning "errors are impossible"⁹⁰ within the biblical text.

Why is it important that Scripture is both inerrant and infallible?

⁸⁸ Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013). 169.

⁸⁹ Frame, *Systematic Theology*, 1129.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

While some parts of Scripture can be difficult to understand at first, Scripture is *clear* in that there is no hidden interpretation or puzzle to figure out its true meaning. God desires for us to know His Word, and anyone of any age or education can understand what it says.

What is encouraging about the clarity of God's Word?

The Bible is *necessary* for “knowledge of the Gospel,” “maintaining spiritual life,” and “for certain knowledge of God’s will.”⁹¹ If we want to live like Jesus, it’s imperative to know what Jesus said and did! Scripture is *sufficient* for knowing such things in that “Scripture contained all the words of God he intended his people to have at each stage of redemptive history.”⁹²

How is it encouraging to know that God has given us everything we need to know & follow Him?

The authority of Scripture means that “all the words in Scripture are God’s words in such a way that to disbelieve or disobey Scripture is to disbelieve or disobey God.”⁹³ If Scripture is inspired, inerrant, infallible, clear, sufficient, and necessary as we have seen, then God’s Word is not only qualified to be authoritative, but it is to be the ultimate authority for our lives. But this authority is not an uncaring or harsh one, but the authority of a loving, trustworthy God who desires His best for us. God wants us to know Him and live life within His good boundaries, and He has given us His Word so that we can know and follow Him.

End today's devotion in prayer, thanking God for making Himself accessible to us through His Word.

⁹¹ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 116-119.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 127.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 73.

Week 1, Day 4: Why Study God's Word?

How sweet your word is to my taste—sweeter than honey in my mouth. Psalm 119:103

Before we fully dive into studying God's Word next week, it's valuable that we talk about why we read and study God's Word. It can be easy for a lot of us to carry the false idea that we read God's Word to gain God's approval. I know from personal experience that this can be a difficult weight to carry, but thankfully, we don't have to. Our righteousness and approval before God are secure in Jesus Christ! This means that we don't study the Bible so that God can delight in us, but so that we may delight in Him.

Let's take some time to read through Psalm 119. It's known as the longest chapter in the Bible, and in it, the narrator describes his relationship with God's Word. It is one of my favorite chapters in the Bible, and I pray that you will be encouraged as you read it and answer the following questions.

How does the writer describe God's Word?

How does the writer describe God?

How does the writer describe the person who reads and follows God's law?

How many times does the writer mention his delight in Scripture?

How is Scripture connected to hard times or trials?

What else sticks out to you (verses or themes)?

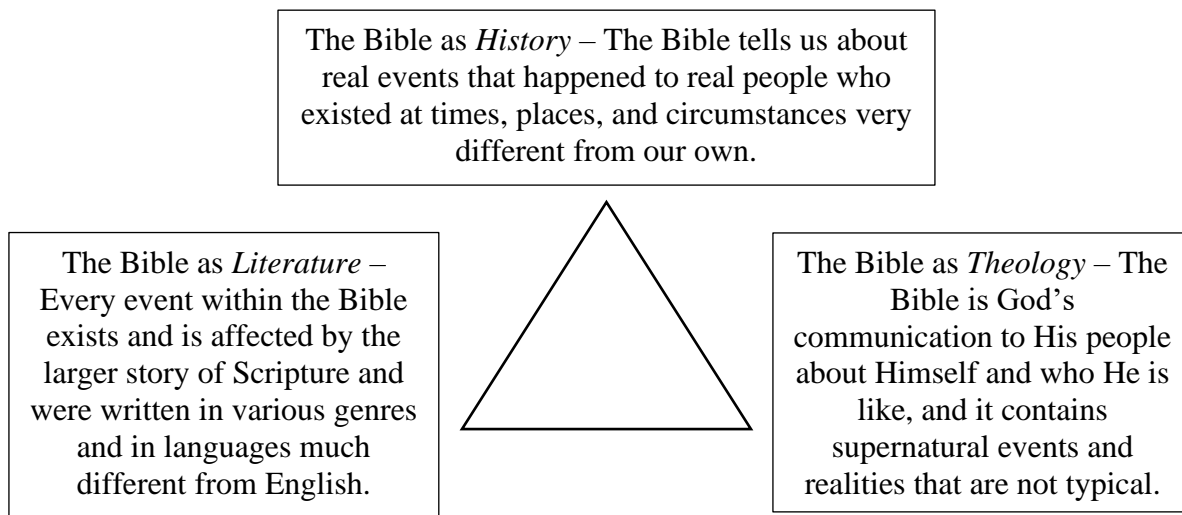
God's Word is not a textbook for us to digest, but a treasure for us to enjoy! By studying God's Word, we get to deepen our relationship with our Savior as we learn to follow Him.

End today's devotion in prayer, asking God to give help you delight in His Word.

Week 1, Day 5: The Bible Study Triangle⁹⁴

Be diligent to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who doesn't need to be ashamed, correctly teaching the word of truth. 2 Timothy 2:15

Welcome to the last day of our first week together! Now that we've finished our crash course on biblical narrative and biblical theology, let's take some time to explore some ideas to keep in mind before we begin learning about the inductive Bible study method. There are three facets through which we study the Bible:



If this is going over your head a bit, that's okay! Just remember that as we're reading and studying Scripture, we're going to spend time looking at the Bible passage's real-world people, places, and events (history), how the passage connects to the rest of the Bible (literature), and what the passage tells us about God.

We look at all three of these parts so that we can get a clear and complete picture of our passage to properly understand what the passage means and what God wants us to learn from it.

Spend some time reflecting on this information. What is familiar? What is new? End in prayer.

⁹⁴ Information adapted from Fuhr, *Inductive Bible Study*, 2-19.

Group Session 2: Introduction to Mark and the Inductive Bible Study Method

For the word of God is living and effective and sharper than any double-edged sword, penetrating as far as the separation of soul and spirit, joints and marrow. It is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. Hebrews 4:12

Welcome back, everyone! Over this past week, we learned a lot about the Bible, its story, uniqueness, and how we approach studying it. Let's spend some time discussing what we learned.

On Day 1, we learned about the story of the Old Testament.

What stood out to you? What information was familiar? What was new?

On Day 2, we learned about the story of the New Testament.

What stood out to you? What information was familiar? What was new?

After learning about the story of Scripture, how did it change your view of the Bible?

How does understanding the greater story of Scripture help us study Scripture?

On Day 3, we learned about different characteristics about the Bible that make it unique.

Which words/concepts were familiar? Which ones were new?

Which characteristic of Scripture did you find the most interesting and why?

Which characteristic of Scripture do you think is the most essential?

How does understanding these characteristics about the Bible help us study it?

On Day 4, we learned about why we study the Bible through reading Psalm 119.

What were your responses to each question?

What other thoughts and reflections do you have from your reading of Psalm 119?

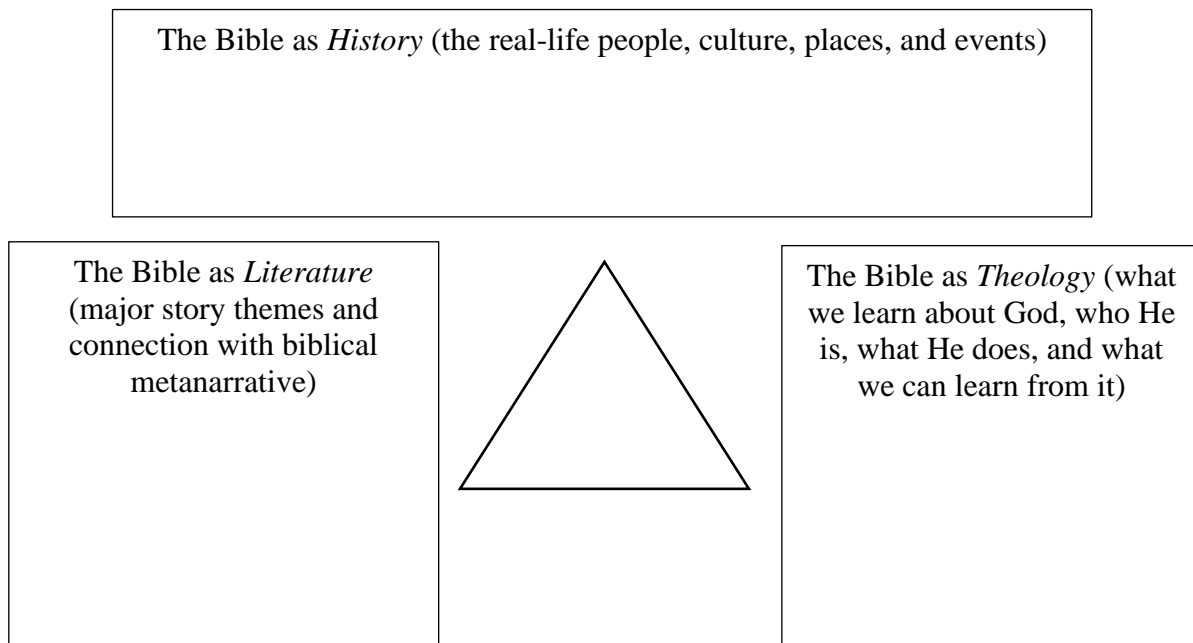
On Day 5, we learned about the Bible Study Triangle.

What are the three points of the triangle? Describe each one?

Which points are more familiar? Which are less familiar?

How does the Triangle affect your view of Scripture?

Now that we've reviewed the past week, let's take a look at the week ahead. As we learn the inductive Bible study method, we will be studying the miracle of the feeding of the 5000 as seen in Mark 6:30-44. Let's first explore the Bible Study Triangle as we familiarize ourselves with the book of Mark as a whole. Together, we're going to watch this video from The Bible Project about the book of Mark⁹⁵ and fill out the Bible Study Triangle below as you listen.



Discuss with your group your notes on the Bible Study Triangle.

How is knowing the context of a book of the Bible helpful for studying a passage within that book?

⁹⁵ *Overview - Mark, Read Scripture*, (Portland, OR: Bible Project, 2016).

Now that we've looked at Mark as a whole, let's narrow our focus to Mark 6. Let's read through the chapter together to get a better glimpse of what's happening before and after our main passage.

Read through Mark 6 and discuss anything that sticks out to you.

Over the next several weeks, we're going to be spending a lot of time in Mark 6:30-44 as we learn how to use the inductive Bible study method. This is likely a familiar passage to you if you've grown up in church. However, as we study this miracle together, I want to encourage you to look at it with fresh eyes and a willingness to learn something new from the passage and discover things that you never saw before. God's Word is "living and active" (Hebrews 4:12, ESV), and there is always something new to learn and appreciate from even the most familiar stories. Oftentimes, we don't need something new, but rather a reminder of familiar truths at greater depths.

Now let's talk about the Inductive Bible Study Method. The inductive method is a "task-oriented, step-by-step process that has been widely accepted... as the most popular and most effective approach to the study of Scripture."⁹⁶ This method stems from what we call *hermeneutics*, which is known as the "science and art of biblical interpretation."⁹⁷ With the inductive approach, we're acting like a detective, making observations and gathering evidence and then coming to a conclusion based on what we found. The goal is discovery, specifically to discover what is known as the *author's intent*, or the meaning that the author intended to

⁹⁶ Fuhr, *Inductive Bible Study*, 20.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

communicate to the people that he wrote to.⁹⁸ As we're doing this, we're keeping in mind that our biblical authors were writing to people at a time, place, and culture that was very different from our own, so it is important that we give each part of the Bible Study Triangle the proper attention.

There are three major steps to the inductive Bible study process:

Observation: "Establish a foundational knowledge of what the text is saying and to discern those issues that may warrant focused study."⁹⁹ In this step, we ask, "what do I see?"

Interpretation: "Understand the meaning of... what the text was intended to convey by its original author to his original audience."¹⁰⁰ Interpretation involves a combination of evaluating our observations and utilizing outside resources. The key question for this step is "What does it mean?"

Application: Based on our interpretation of what our text meant to the original audience; we will discern how we can apply the principle from the passage to our modern life. In this step, we ask several questions that help us answer the bigger question of "How do I respond?"

Discuss the Inductive Bible Method. What is familiar? What is new?

Why is important that we follow the three steps in that order?

These next few weeks we will be focusing on the observation step, which will involve a lot of reading and re-reading, note-taking, and highlighting in various colors. We'll start with

⁹⁸ Fuhr, *Inductive Bible Study*, 35.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 39.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 40.

some basic observations, formulate questions from our observations, and observe some common key relationships within our passage.

This week will be focusing on basic observations and hanging out with what I like to call the basic observation boy band: Who, What, When, Where, and (important) Words. With our main vocalist the Who (not to be mistaken for the famous rock band), we'll be highlighting references to people. Our lead guitarist What represents all the actions that take place in our passage. Our drummer When represents any references to time or days, and bassist Where represents references to location or position. While When and Where are not as prevalent as Who and What, like the drummer and bassist, they help anchor us in the world our passage takes place in. Words is our keyboard player, identifying repeated and important words to make note of. While this is a silly illustration, it is a helpful way to think about our basic observations and how they work together to give us a clear picture of our text.

As you're in the midst of observations these next few weeks, it can be easy to only see the words on the page and distance ourselves mentally from the real events and people we're studying and, most importantly, what God is doing in and through these events and people. As you're making your observations each day, take some time to read the passage and take in what Jesus is doing and teaching His disciples. The whole point of us learning this Bible study method is so that we can deepen our relationship with God. Let's not miss what God is saying to us in the pages of His Word.

End this session with prayer, thanking God for His Word, the ability to read and study the Scriptures, and ask Him to help you pay attention to His Word as you study it this week.

Week 2, Day 1: Who

This week, we're going to do some basic observations of the text. This is my personal favorite part of the inductive Bible study method because I get to grab my colored pencils and start coloring up my Bible! Seeing the different colors on the page really helps me to see just how vibrant God's Word really is. There are so many words and phrases that can get overlooked on a first read-through of a Bible passage but then stick out after reading through multiple times.

Begin by reading through Mark 6:30-44.

Today we're going to be focusing on the Who, which are all the people that are mentioned in a particular Bible passage. This can include:

- Any references to God, Jesus, the Holy Spirit, and their various names
- Specific names of people
- References to groups of people
- References to nations as people groups (as opposed to its geographical location)

Pick a color that you will use to highlight all the people in Mark 6:30-44. I personally use yellow; it's a bright color that's easy to spot! If you want, you can use one color for any references to God or Jesus and a different color for all the other people. You can do your highlights in your personal Bible or on the Mark 6:30-44 text printed in the back of your book.

I've given you plenty of space to highlight, take notes, and draw on the passage.

Highlight all the references to people in Mark 6:30-44 and list out your observations below.

If you want to practice this skill further, highlight the references to people in the rest of Mark 6.

End today's devotion in prayer, thanking God for the people of Scripture and asking Him to help you live more like Jesus.

Week 2, Day 2: What

In our previous devotion, we focused on the Who of Mark 6:30-44, and today we're going to look at the What of our passage, which are the actions that take place in these verses. *Begin by reading through Mark 6:30-44, paying attention to the people you highlighted yesterday.*

Knowing the actions that take place in a passage is important because these actions inform us about the personalities, motivations, and values of the people in the narrative, help us visualize what is going on in the text, and call to attention to important details. Words related to actions (the What) includes:

- Actions verbs (ex. run or gather)
- Words ending in -ing (ex. running or gathering)
- Past tense verbs (ex. ran or gathered)
- Connecting/helping verbs (ex. had, should, was, am, is, are, do, etc.)

Pick a color that you will use to highlight all the verbs and actions in Mark 6:30-44. I personally use green because it reminds me of a green light on a traffic signal. Green means go! Go ahead and highlight the actions in the passage in the same place you highlighted the people.

After you've highlighted the actions, write down your observations below and make note of any actions that might be repeated.

If you want to practice this skill further, highlight the verbs and actions in the rest of Mark 6.

End today's devotion in prayer, thanking God for what He has done. Thank Jesus for doing the greatest action of sacrificing His life on the cross for our sins and resurrecting from the dead.

Pray that your actions would be a reflection of who Jesus is.

Week 2, Day 3: When

Congrats on identifying all the people and actions in Mark 6:30-44 (or the whole chapter)! Now that we spent time with our boy band front men Who and What, we're going to spend the next two devotions with the rhythm section When and Where.

Begin by reading through Mark 6:30-44, paying attention to the highlights you have already made, and adding any you may have missed.

Today, it's all about time, and we'll be looking for words related to time. This can include:

- Dates
- Occasions (ex., Passover)
- Times of day (ex., morning, noon, night)
- Words such as before, during, after, earlier, now, later, when, then, until, etc.

Pick a color that you will use to highlight all the references to time in Mark 6:30-44 - I like to use blue! Now, alongside your previous highlights, identify all the references to time in the passage.

After you've highlighted the time references, write down your observations below and make note of any actions that might be repeated.

If you want to practice this skill further, highlight the time references in the rest of Mark 6.

End today's devotion in prayer, thanking God for His timing. Our God is never early or late; He neither rushes nor falls behind. Pray that you would trust God's timing in all things.

Week 2, Day 4: Where

We're over halfway through Week 2, and our passage is starting to get pretty colorful!!

Today we're looking for words related to location and position. This one is my personal favorite not just because I play the bass, but identifying location helps us to get a glimpse of the real-world places that the events of the Bible happened in!

Begin by reading through Mark 6:30-44, paying attention to the highlights you have already made.

Location, location, location! We're looking for words related to location and position today, which include:

- Geographical regions or nations (ex., Galilee, Israel)
- Geographical features and landmarks (ex., rivers, mountains)
- Buildings or manmade landmarks (ex., the temple)
- Propositions such as over, under, above, below, around, through

Pick a color that you will use to highlight all the references to location and position in Mark 6:30-44 – I prefer to use orange.

Highlight all the references to location and position, and write down your observations below.

If you want to practice this skill further, highlight the location and position references in the rest of Mark 6.

End today's devotion in prayer, thanking God for the places He used in Scripture to bring about

His will and ask Him to help you be faithful in the places you're in right now.

Week 2, Day 5: Important Words & Key Questions

Welcome the final devotion for this week! At this point, your passage is filled with colors and observations. We're going to end this week by adding one more color and then asking questions that will help us start to put our observations together.

Begin by reading through Mark 6:30-44, paying attention to the highlights you have already made, and adding any you may have missed.

Today we're going to be highlighting important words. These include:¹⁰¹

- Words that are repeated several times
- Words that might be new or confusing
- Words that are most important to understanding the passage
- Words that have theological or symbolic importance
- Words that relate to the culture, geography, or history of the text
- Any other words that stick out to you

To mark these words, I've sometimes highlighted them with a red pencil or circled or underlined them in pen. I encourage you to experiment and figure out what works for you!

Highlight, underline, or circle all the important words and write down your observations below.

If you want to practice this skill further, mark the important words in the rest of Mark 6.

Now slowly read through your passage and write down any questions you may have in the space below. We want to start asking interpretive how and why questions, but they also can be who, what, when, and where questions.

End today's devotion in prayer, thanking God for giving us all the words of Scripture.

¹⁰¹ Partially adapted from Fuhr, "Table 5.1," *Inductive Bible Study*, 102.

Group Session 3

Welcome back, friends! This week has been full of observations and color, and I bet we all feel more familiar with Jesus' miracle of the feeding of the five thousand! Let's take some time to review what we've studied this week and help each other catch anything we might have missed.

On Day 1, we observed all the people mentioned in our text.

Who were these people? What do you know about them?

On Day 2, we observed all the actions that took place.

What were the actions and verbs in the text? Who did what?

What actions were repeated?

On Day 3, we identified all the time-related words in the text.

Were there any dates or years mentioned?

Were there any times of day mentioned?

What other time-related words were included?

On Day 4, we looked for words related to location and position.

Were there any geographical regions present?

Were there any geographical or manmade landmarks mentioned?

What propositions were included?

On Day 5, we highlighted important words and created key questions.

What were the important words each person highlighted? Why did they highlight these words?

What were the key questions that each person came up with?

Which questions can be answered by the text? Which questions require additional resources?

What are some other important questions related to the three points of the Bible Study Triangle (history, literature, and theology)?

If you've practiced the basic observations in the rest of Mark 6, what were some interesting things that you observed?

What else did you observe about Mark 6:30-44 this week?

In what ways do you better understand the miracle of the feeding of the five thousand after just one week of observations?

Today, we're going to work together to complete another step in our observation journey. If you've ever bought a Bible, you may have noticed as you were looking online or in a store that there are many different versions to choose from, each with its own abbreviation. There's NIV (New International Version), KJV (King James Version), CSB (Christian Standard Bible), and ESV (English Standard Version), just to name a few of the many, many Bible versions that exist. *Why do you think there are so many different versions of the Bible?*

The simple answer is that the Bible wasn't written in English! The Old Testament was originally written in Hebrew (with a few portions in Aramaic¹⁰²), and the New Testament was written in Greek.¹⁰³ While we do not have the original texts, known as *autographs*, we do have thousands of ancient copies, known as *manuscripts*, ranging from fragments to entire books of the Bible.¹⁰⁴ From these numerous copies, teams of professional researchers, translators, Bible

¹⁰² Scott J. Duvall, and J. Daniel Hays. *Grasping God's Word: A Hands-On Approach to Reading, Interpreting, and Applying the Bible*. (Grand Rapids: HarperCollins Christian Publishing, 2012). 24.

¹⁰³ Johnston, *The IVP Introduction to the Bible*, 6-7.

¹⁰⁴ Duvall, *Grasping God's Word*, 25.

scholars, and other experts have worked together to translate Scripture from the original languages into English (and hundreds of other languages!).

These two languages – Hebrew and Greek – are very different from English, with different alphabets, grammars, and styles. If you have ever translated something in Google Translate, you know that translation can get messy if not done carefully. Another reason for different English translations is that English has changed over time. Even though the *King James Bible* is written in English, the thee’s and thou’s quickly let us know that this is a much older translation written in an English that’s very different than what we speak today.

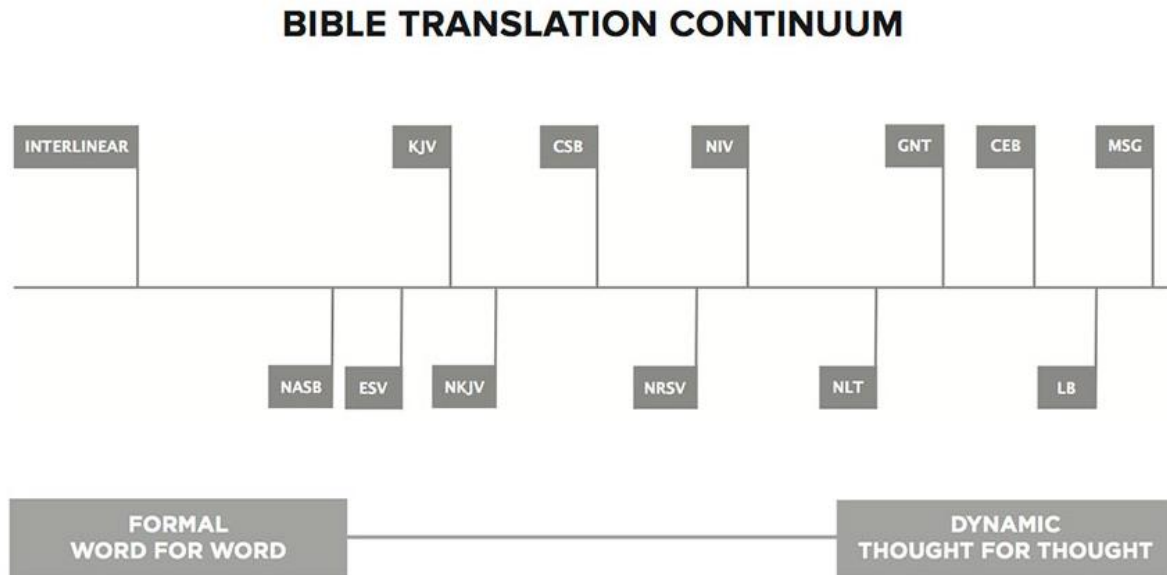
The main reason for the different translations is that there are different approaches to translating these ancient languages. One method is the *formal* approach, also known as the word-for-word approach, which seeks to translate the text literally “to stay as close as possible to the structure and words of the source language.”¹⁰⁵ A second method is the *functional* approach, also known as the thought-for-thought approach, which seeks to “express the meaning of the original text in today’s language.”¹⁰⁶ Most English versions of the Bible primarily follows some combination of the two methods, generally preferring one method over another.

So which translation should you use? While it is valuable to having both a formal translation and a functional translation, the most important thing about choosing a Bible translation is that you can understand it and study it. The text of Mark 6 in the back of this book

¹⁰⁵ Duvall, *Grasping God’s Word*, 35.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

uses the CSB translation, which uses both the formal and functional approaches heavily. Below is a chart of how popular Bible translations use the two approaches.¹⁰⁷



Bible translations shown in the top half of the chart are original translations directly from ancient languages to English. Versions shown below the line began with the English text of another Bible translation.

What do you think might be some pros and cons of the formal and functional approaches?

Now we’re going to take a closer look at Mark 6:30-44 in different translations. Split into four groups and have each group pick a version from the diagram above to compare to the CSB text below, writing down each verse and making note of which words are the same, different, or in a different order. [first verse example included below]

CSB 30 The apostles gathered around Jesus and reported to him all that they had done and taught.	NLT 30 The apostles returned to Jesus from their ministry tour and told him all they had done and taught.
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After finishing up your translation analysis, discuss the observations each group made.

¹⁰⁷ Diagram taken from <https://csbible.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/BibleTranslationContinuum-02-09.jpg>.

What was the same between the CSB and your translation? What was different between them?

Which translation is the most like the CSB? Which one is the most different?

What are some words and phrases that are different among all translations?

Comparing the same text in different versions can help us better understand the passage and reveal differences that might need some more research. Even comparing one formal translation and one functional translation can be useful in making these observations.

This week, we're going to go deeper into some more observations. We'll be looking for words that can often get overlooked but are super important in helping us understand the passage. We're also going to piece together the structure of Mark 6:30-44 and create a summary statement for the passage.

I can guess what you might be thinking. "So many observations! When are we going to talk about what the passage means or what I'm supposed to do with it?" I get it. Sometimes the observation step feels a bit tedious. I also sometimes want to rush ahead to interpretation and application and figure out how I can apply the text to my life. But there's a reason why we do these steps in order. We can't know how to apply the text to our life in the way God intends us to if we don't first understand what the text means, and we can't know what the text means if we don't know what it says. You might have noticed words in the text week that you had seen before but never appreciated the value they brought to the text. Each of these words was intentionally given to us by God through His people, and they each deserve careful attention.

You probably might not be used to spending so much time on a handful of verses because you might be more used to reading a chapter or more of Scripture a day (any of y'all ever attempted to read the Bible in a year?). We'll talk more about this later in this study, but I want

to encourage you by saying that God cares far less about how much Scripture you can read in a day or week, and He cares far more about how you are seeking to understand His Word. There is a sea of grace for each of us.

Close this session in prayer, thanking God for the faithful translation of His Word and asking Him for grace and patience as you continue your observations this week.

Week 3, Day 1: Emphasis, Reason/Purpose, Result/Summary¹⁰⁸

Welcome to our second week of observations! This week, we're diving into some more specific observations of our text. Because these are more specific than our observations from last week, there are fewer of each one in any given passage, and some of them may not show up in a passage, so we're going to tackle a few each day.

Begin by reading through Mark 6:30-44, paying attention to the highlights you have already made, and adding any you may have missed.

For our highlights for this week, we're going to use the same color for all of them, so I encourage you to use a lighter color and then labeling your observations in pen.

First are our words of emphasis. These include words like *indeed*, *only*, *truly*, and *behold*. These words are meant to grab your attention and add importance or detail to its context.

Next are the words that point to the reason or purpose for people's actions in the text. These include words like *because*, *for*, *since*, *in order that*, *so that*, and *that*. The word *that* may not always be used to denote reason or purpose, so make sure to read the whole sentence before highlighting your observation.

The last set of words that we're looking for today are words that indicate the result of an action or event or provide a summary of points. These include words such as *so*, *then*, *therefore*, and *thus*.

Mark these three sets of observation words and write your observation below.

If you want to practice this skill further, mark these observation words in the rest of Mark 6.

End today's devotion in prayer, thanking Him for giving you His Word and the ability to study it.

¹⁰⁸ Day 1, 2 and 3 are adapted from Michael J. Smith, "Observation: A Bible Study Methods Checklist," 2013.

Week 3, Day 2: Compare/Contrast, Cause/Effect, If/Then

For today's observations, we're focusing on three pairs of observations. We'll be looking for words that compare or contrast two people, objects, or events, determining the cause and effect of various moments within our text, and we'll be looking for conditional if/then statements. Our particular passage does not contain all three of these observations, so I would encourage you to practice these observations on the rest of Mark 6.

Begin by reading through Mark 6:30-44.

First, we will be looking at comparison and contrast. Comparison words include *also*, *and*, *as*, *like*, *so also*, and *likewise*. Contrast words include *but*, *yet*, *although*, *otherwise*, *nevertheless*, and *then*. Make sure you read each sentence in context before highlighting a word as a comparison or contrast. You may also highlight words that denote a negative, such as *not* and *without*.

Next, we will observe words related to cause and effect. This is related to our result/summary words, but this focuses on how one event led to another. Cause and effect words include *and* and *so*. Both comparison/contrast and cause/effect may be seen in a passage or chapter without those words, so pay close attention!

Finally, we are looking for conditional if/then statements (if "thing A" happens/is true, then "thing B" will happen/is true).

Mark these three sets of observation words and write your observation below.

If you want to practice this skill further, mark these observation words in the rest of Mark 6.

End today's devotion in prayer, asking God to help you fully observe and understand the passage.

Week 3, Day 3: Lists, Questions, Dialogue

Today begins our last set of word-based observations. We'll be looking for lists, questions, and analyzing the dialogue of our passage. If our observations over the past two weeks have been like looking at our passage with a microscope, looking intently at every word, then today and the rest of this week will have us zooming out to look at our passage as a whole.

Begin by reading through Mark 6:30-44.

First, we will look for lists within our passage. Lists will typically include three or more items (ex., bread, eggs, and milk). If you find two items paired together (hint: there's a pretty major pair of food items!), note them as a pair and not a list.

Next, we're going to be looking for questions found within the passage. While doing this, try to not just look at the question marks, but look at the questions themselves. What are the questions asking? Are they rhetorical, information-gathering, or practical? Who is asking the question, and who is being asked?

For our final word-based observation, we're going to be looking at the dialogue of our passage. When observing the dialogue, make notes on who is speaking to whom, what is being discussed, what the speaker's tone is, and what the causes and outcomes of the dialogue are.

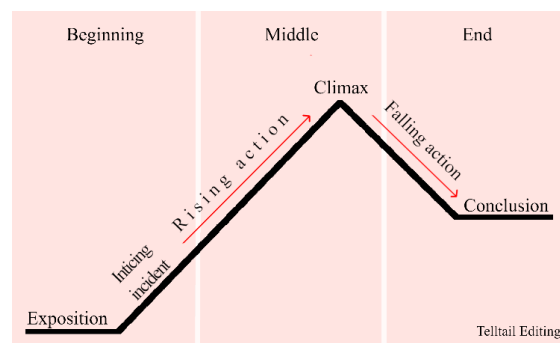
Mark these three sets of observation words and write your observation below.

If you want to practice this skill further, mark these observation words in the rest of Mark 6.

End today's devotion in prayer, thanking God for the detail He put into His Word to communicate the Gospel to us.

Week 3, Day 4: Narrative Arc Structure

After two and a half weeks, we are finally done with our word-based observations! Taking the time to highlight and analyze all these words will help us not only understand the details of our text but also help us to also see the big picture. Speaking of the big picture, today we're going to be looking at the narrative arc structure of Mark 6:30-44. Narrative arc is very common in writing; in fact, you may have seen a picture like this in your English class:¹⁰⁹



After reading through Mark 6:30-44, section off in the margins the parts of the narrative arc, using the following information to help guide you.

Exposition – “The basic setting is described, and the main series of events begin.”¹¹⁰

Inciting Incident – The introduction of the central conflict of the narrative.

Rising Action – The conflict develops, and tensions rise.

Climax – The point of greatest tension in the narrative.

Falling Action – Tensions ease, the conflict is being resolved.

Conclusion – The conflict has been resolved; the details of the narrative are being wrapped up.

End today's devotion in prayer.

¹⁰⁹ Sara Burgess, “What Is a Narrative Arc?,” *Teltrail Editing* (blog), September 25, 2019, <https://teltrailediting.com/what-is-a-narrative-arc/>.

¹¹⁰ Duvall, *Grasping God's Word*, 339.

Week 3, Day 5: Log Line

To wrap things up in the observation, we're going to write a log line for Mark 6:30-44. If you've ever scrolled Netflix looking for a movie to watch, you've likely read a log line or two. These are the short summary statements that give us a basic idea of a movie or TV show's main characters and conflict and are meant to create interest.¹¹¹ There are four main elements to a good log line: the hero the story revolves around (hint: in the Bible, it's always God!), the goal the hero wants to achieve, the obstacle the hero has to overcome, and the change that occurs over the course of the plot.

Using a streaming platform, look up the log lines for a few of your favorite movies, and write them below. Label the four elements (hero, goal, obstacle, change) in each.

Writing log lines to biblical passages help us zoom out from our detailed observations, forcing us to describe the basic elements of the passage in about thirty words. Not every important piece of information is written in a log line, but just enough is included so that the reader can have a basic idea. As you practice writing a logline for Mark 6:30-44, remember that our hero in this passage is Jesus.

Read Mark 6:30-44 and write a log line below that summarizes the passage. Remember that the passage is ultimately about Jesus and what He is doing.

Take a look at your log line. What information is included? What details are excluded?

Writing a log line is a skill that improves with time and practice, so it's okay if you find this tricky at first!

End today's devotion in prayer, thanking God for all the observations you made this week.

¹¹¹ Jeff Chen, "Logline Examples: 74 Famous Examples You Should Know," *NFI*, March 14, 2021, <https://www.nfi.edu/logline-examples/>.

Group Session 4: Introduction to Interpretation: Context

Welcome back, everyone! This week we dove deeper into our observations and got even more familiar with Mark 6:30-44. By now, you should be ready to begin transitioning to the interpretation stage, but first, let's review what we worked on this week.

On Day 1, we looked for words related to emphasis, reason/purpose, and result/summary.

Where was the emphasis given? How did that word impact what was emphasized?

Where was a reason or purpose given in the text? How does knowing the reason or purpose given in the text help us understand more about the who, what, when, and where?

Where was a result or summary provided? What led to that result?

On Day 2, we looked for words related to compare/contrast, cause/effect, and if/then statements.

What was being compared? What was being contrasted?

What were some negative words that were included? How do they impact the meaning of the text?

What were the causes? What were the effects?

Were there if/then statements in the main text? In the whole chapter?

How do these observations impact our understanding of the text and its details?

On Day 3, we observed lists, questions, and dialogue within the text.

What lists or pairs were included in the text?

What questions were posed? How were the questions answered (or not answered)?

What was the dialogue in the text? Who were the people involved? What did they say? How did they respond?

On Day 4, we practiced identifying the components of the narrative arc structure.

Compare and contrast the narrative arc divisions each person made and then work together to make one narrative arc structure.

What details are given in the exposition? What is the inciting incident?

How is the conflict developed over the rising action, climax, and falling action?

How is the conflict resolved? How is the passage concluded?

On Day 5, we composed loglines for Mark 6:30-44.

Compare and contrast the loglines each person wrote. Work together to write one logline based on the loglines everyone wrote.

How does the logline help us put together all the observations we have made?

This week, we're beginning the interpretation stage of inductive Bible study. If the observation step was about asking "what does the text say?" then the interpretation step is about asking "what does the text mean?" More specifically, we're going to be investigating what message the author was trying to communicate to his audience. This is known as *authorial intent*.¹¹² Taking the time to investigate what the biblical author wanted his audience to understand from the text will help us not only have a better understanding of Scripture but will also help us when we later determine how God may want us to apply the Scriptures to our lives.

Remember our Bible Study Triangle? It will be incredibly helpful for us this week. In order for us to grasp the theological meaning of our Mark 6 text, we must first gain a clearer picture of both the historical and literary contexts. We learned some context information when we watched the Bible Project video in our week 2 session.

¹¹² Duvall, *Grasping God's Word*, 193.

Look at your notes from the Bible Project video. Discuss the notes you wrote down and other information that will be important for you to know now that you've spent the past few weeks in observation.

Context can be divided into two categories: historical and literary. Historical context deals with real-world events, geography, political situation, peoples, and cultures that comprise the historical moment within and surrounding the text. We can gain some understanding of the historical context through reading the text, but there are some elements of historical context that may require some outside research.

As we investigate the historical context together, it is important to remember that while the people of the Bible lived at a very different time, place, culture, and historical moment than us, they share many of the same core desires as we do. Throughout history, people have desired to receive and give love, to have security from dangers, and to provide for their needs. These desires, while similar, are sought after differently by different people in different times. Ultimately, everyone, regardless of whether they realize it or not, desires to know and love God and be known and loved by God.

Separate into four groups and have each group answer three of the questions below regarding the book of Mark.¹¹³ Start by using the book of Mark to help answer the questions, and then utilize Constable's Notes on the Book of Mark from Plano Bible Chapel to assist with the rest.¹¹⁴ After each group has answered their questions, discuss your findings together.

1. Who was the author?

¹¹³ Chris H. Hulshof, "Historical Context" (Lecture, BIBL 350, Liberty University, Lynchburg, VA, October 14, 2020).

¹¹⁴ Thomas L. Constable, "Notes on Mark" (Plano Bible Chapel, 2023).

2. *What was his background?*
3. *When did he write?*
4. *What was the nature of his ministry?*
5. *What kind of relationship did he have with the audience?*
6. *Why was he writing?*
7. *Who was the biblical audience?*
8. *What were their circumstances?*
9. *How was their relationship to God?*
10. *What kind of relationship did they have with each other?*
11. *What was happening at the time the book was written?*
12. *Are there any other historical-cultural factors that might shed light on the book?*

After digging into the historical context surrounding the book of Mark, you should hopefully have a better idea of who Mark was, who is original audience was, and what was going on at the time of the events of this Gospel. This week in your devotions, we're going to focus on the literary context of Mark 6:30-44 and how it relates to the rest of the chapter, the book of Mark, and the Bible as a whole. As we keep uncovering the layers of our text, I hope that you are beginning to see the richness and beauty that is found in looking a little closer and staying a little longer in the verses of Scripture. As I've studied Scripture on my own and in Bible college, o God has reminded me again and again is that there is yet still more to uncover. There are numerous details and connections that God has placed in His Word for us to find. These gems, while overlooked on a first read, give us reason to glorify the God who is in every detail.

End this session in prayer, thanking God for orchestrating every detail of His Word.

Week 4, Day 1: Looking at Mark 6

This week, we're going to be investigating the literary context of Mark 6:30-44. We spent the first couple weeks zoomed in on our passage, and we're going to see how this miracle and interaction between Jesus and his disciples fits within what's happening in chapter 6, the book of Mark, the Gospels, and the Bible as a whole. We do this "zoom-out" approach so that the theological principle we interpret from our passage matches up with the author's intent and the overarching story of Scripture. When we limit ourselves to just the passage we are studying, it can be easy to miss the larger themes the biblical authors were communicating.

Today, we're looking at Mark 6, which contains a sequence of events that are connected to one another. If you've done the extra highlighting work in Mark 6, you might have noticed some connections.

Read through Mark 6, looking at the headings in your Bible. Write down the headings and a one-sentence summary of the events that occur within that heading.

Compare and contrast Mark 6:30-44 with each of the other sections of Mark 6 and write your observations below.

One observation you might make is that verses 7-13 give context for the beginning of our main passage. You might also have seen that in verse 52 that the disciples missed something important that Jesus was trying to teach them with this miracle. Keep this in mind as you continue your study. You also may have observed some similarities between King Herod's banquet and Jesus's "feast."

Use the chart below to compare the elements of these two events.

End today's devotion in prayer, thanking God for the interconnected details of His Word.

Week 4, Day 2: Looking at Mark

By observing at how the miracle of the feeding of the 5000 is connected to events before and after it in the same chapter, hopefully you see just how interconnected the events of the Gospels are. Today, we're going to take a look at how scholars break books of the Bible into sections to help us better understand the flow of events.

In your Bible, you most likely have headings that separate paragraphs into the events or topics that are contained. These are helpful in identifying the “scenes” within a book, but they don't necessarily help us identify the larger “acts.” This is where a commentary can be useful. Biblical scholars write commentaries to help those who study the Bible (like you and me!) fill in informational gaps. We used a commentary during the group session to help us answer historical questions that our biblical author didn't give to us. However, commentaries are not the end all be all when it comes to interpreting the Scriptures. While these commentary writers may have fancy degrees and more years of close biblical study, you and I are just as capable of understanding what Scripture says through careful study. Remember, “the primary reason we use commentaries is not to have others tell us what the Bible means. Rather, it's to provide information and insight that better equips us to make our own decisions about what the Bible says.”¹¹⁵

Using Constable's Notes on Mark found on Plano Bible Chapel, read through the outline, and fill in the chart below with the section headings for the section surrounding Mark 6:30-44.

End today's devotion by thanking God for biblical scholars and the resources they've created.

¹¹⁵ Fuhr, *Inductive Bible Study*, 272.

Week 4, Day 3: Looking at the Gospels

After looking at the outline of Mark in Constable's Notes, you should have a better picture of how Mark 6:30-44 relates to the other events within Mark and the general narrative arc of the book. Today, we're going to compare our passage to the passages on the feeding of the 5000 in the other Gospels. These are what are known as parallel passages, which is defined as "two [or more] texts describing the same approximate events." We see this a lot in the Gospels, which all record Jesus Christ's life, ministry, death, and ministry, but each with a different perspective, a different audience, a different writing style, and different themes. There are also books in the Old Testament that parallel one another, such as 1 & 2 Chronicles, which parallel 1 & 2 and 1 & 2 Kings.¹¹⁶ Additionally, Paul's letters were written during the events of the book of Acts.

Read through Mark 6:30-44 and compare our passage with similar accounts in Matthew 14:13-21, Luke 9:12-17, and John 6:1-14, making sure to slowly and carefully read through each parallel passage. Write the similarities, differences, and any other observations you have in the space below.

Go back to your key questions in Week 2 and see how many you can answer based on additional information found in the parallel passages.

When parallel passages have different information or are written differently, this is because these passages are written by different authors with different audiences and different goals in mind.

End today's devotion in prayer, thanking God for the Gospels and the gospel truth within them.

¹¹⁶ Hill, Andrew E., *1 and 2 Chronicles*, (Grand Rapids: HarperCollins Christian Publishing, 2003), 18.

Week 4, Day 4: Looking at the Whole Bible

After spending time in the New Testament, we're going to take some time today to think about this miracle of the feeding of the 5000 in light of the metanarrative (overarching story) of Scripture. We do this by looking at different themes and *motifs*, or "a repeated theme that reflects the interests of the biblical writers"¹¹⁷ that appear all throughout Scripture. The first motif we look at is God, His character, and His actions. Ultimately, Scripture is how God reveals Himself to us, and each passage He gives us is an opportunity to get to know Him better.

After rereading Mark 6:30-44, what does our passage tell us about Jesus, His character, and His actions? There may be more than one answer.

How do we see these aspects of God's character reflected elsewhere in Scripture?

Another major theme in the Bible is relationship – how God relates to His people, how people relate to God, and how people relate to each other. Because God is unchanging, and people are prone to repeat themselves, similar dynamics can appear throughout Scripture.

How does Jesus relate to His disciples? With the crowd (includes believers and unbelievers)?¹¹⁸

How do the disciples relate to Jesus? How do the disciples relate to the crowd?

How does the crowd relate to Jesus? How does the crowd relate to the disciples?

How do we see these relationship dynamics reflected elsewhere in Scripture?

What other themes do you see?

Where else do these themes appear in Scripture?

End today's devotion in prayer, asking God to help you understand the themes of Scripture.

¹¹⁷ Fuhr, *Inductive Bible Study*, 255.

¹¹⁸ Constable, "Notes on Mark," 149.

Week 4, Day 5: Passage Principle

Moving from interpretation to application, we're going to create a *passage principle*, or a general theological idea that can be applied to any context. While a logline is a summary of one passage, the passage principle zooms out from one tree to see the whole theological forest. Our principle won't contain specific application, but it will tell us about who God is, what He does, and how humanity is shaped by Him. In short, you will identify "the one thing the whole thing is saying."¹¹⁹ Writing the passage principle helps us see the greater relevance of our text.

When writing the passage principle, we will also be engaging in a process known as *correlation*, which is "the comparison of an interpreted text with other related texts."¹²⁰ When doing correlation, there are three questions to consider:

What was the intended application for the original audience?¹²¹ (What were they to know & do?)

How is the principle reflected in the rest of Scripture?¹²²

How is the principle reflected in the person, life, and ministry of Jesus Christ?¹²³

Feel free to take time to meditate on our passage and everything you have learned so far, using Constable's Notes if needed. Interpretation is best done unhurriedly.

Write your passage principle below and how it answers the three questions.

End today's devotion in prayer, asking God to help you see His Word more and more clearly.

¹¹⁹ Chris H. Hulshof, "Identifying the Passage Principle," (Lecture, BIBL 350, Liberty University, Lynchburg, VA, November 6, 2020).

¹²⁰ Fuhr, *Inductive Bible Study*, 38.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 315.

¹²² Hulshof, "Identifying the Passage Principle."

¹²³ *Ibid.*

Group Session 5: Application

We did it, friends! After diligently working through observation and interpretation these past several weeks, we have finally made it to the application step of the inductive Bible study method. Give yourself a pat on the back for sticking with it! Before we jump into talking about application, let's review this past week and discuss what we've learned.

This week, we slowly zoomed out from Mark 6:30-44 to understand how our passage fits within the larger narratives within Scripture.

Why is it important that we take the time to study the context surrounding our passage?

On Day 1, we looked at how Mark 6:30-44 fit in with the rest of the chapter.

What did you observe from looking at Mark 6 more closely?

What comparisons did you make between Jesus and Herod?

On Day 2, we zoomed out to see how our passage fit with the rest of the Gospel of Mark.

What larger section (and sub-sections) does Mark 6:30-44 occur in?

Where does this passage fit within the life and ministry of Jesus Christ in the book of Mark?

What other observations did you make from looking at the outline of the book of Mark?

On Day 3, we compared the different accounts of the miracle of the feeding of the 5000 in the other Gospels.

What did you observe from comparing Mark to the other Gospels?

Which parallel text was the most similar? Which was the most different?

What information did you learn from the parallel texts about this event?

On Day 4, we identified how our passage highlights the larger themes of Scripture.

How does our passage reflect the themes of God's character and relationships?

Where do you see these themes reflected elsewhere in Scripture?

What other themes did you observe from our passage?

How are these themes reflected elsewhere in Scripture?

On Day 5, we put together everything we've learned and condensed it into a passage principle.

What passage principle did you write?

How does your passage principle answer our three questions?

Work together to make one collaborative passage principle.

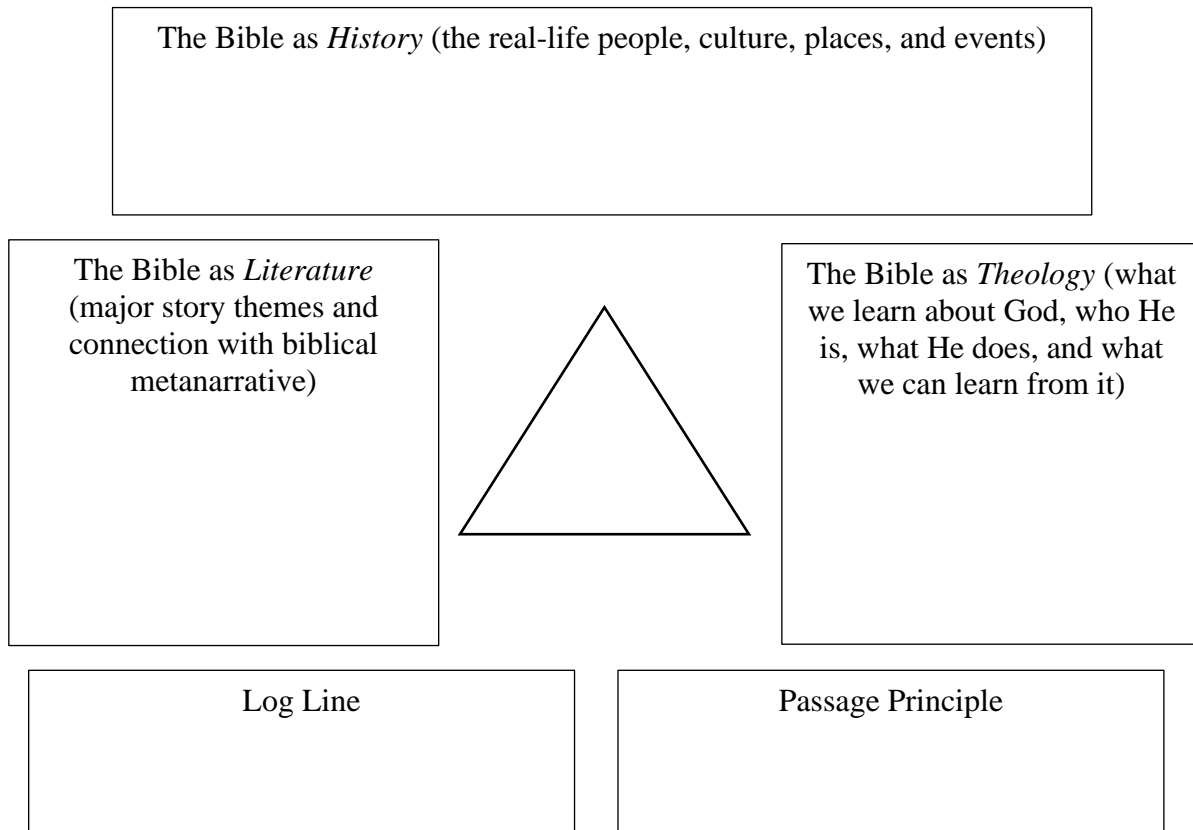
One idea I hope you took away from this week is the theme of God's provision. Throughout our passage, we see Jesus providing what was lacking in the people He interacted with. While the crowd desired to see Jesus perform healing and miracles, He knew they needed to receive teaching. He spent several hours teaching the crowd, even though he and the disciples were already tired.¹²⁴ The disciples wanted the crowd to leave and provide their own meals, but Jesus knew that the disciples needed to learn that He is the Provider. Jesus had the disciples recognize their inability to provide so that He could demonstrate His provision.¹²⁵ And Jesus provided in abundance. Instead of providing just enough for each person to have a few bites, He provided each person with a satisfying meal (Mark 6:42), and He produced enough for each disciple to have a basket of leftovers for their next meal (Mark 6:43).¹²⁶

¹²⁴ Constable, "Notes on Mark," 147.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Rodney L. Cooper, *Holman New Testament Commentary – Mark*, (New York: B&H Publishing Group, 2000), 106.

Now, taking what you’ve learned, work together as a group to fill out the Bible Study Triangle below with your observations, interpretation, and other important notes from the past several weeks of study.



We’ve gained a lot these past several studying Mark 6:30-44 in depth as we learned the inductive Bible study method. Before we jump into doing application, let’s talk about how we approach the application step. In transitioning between interpretation and application, there are several leaps that we take. First is the jump between the “there and then” of the original historical context to the “here and now” of modern day.¹²⁷ Second is the jump we make from looking at the text objectively (the facts) to looking at it subjectively (what does it mean for you personally).

¹²⁷ Fuhr, *Inductive Bible Study*, 41.

When making the leap to application, it can be easy to lose what we've gained in favor of quick, surface-level applications. A silly example of a hasty application would be as follows:

“Jesus multiplied bread and fish. I’m supposed to imitate Jesus. Therefore, I should be able replicate this miracle and multiply bread and fish with my bare hands.”

While we can say with confidence that this example is not a valid application, it does represent the hastiness that is sometimes seen in the application step. Let’s look at a more common example of improper application.

Have someone in the group read Philippians 4:13.¹²⁸

In what situations is this verse most commonly heard?

When used in a sports context, what is the verse used to inspire?

Have someone else in the group read Philippians 4:10-19?

In light of the context surrounding this verse, what might be a more appropriate principle?

In determining the application of a text, we must remember that “a text cannot be meaningful today in a way that is inconsistent with the original author’s intended meaning.”¹²⁹

Our time spent in the interpretation stage and thinking through the passage principle will help keep us from faulty application, but it is important that we make sure our applications line up with our passage, our observation and interpretation work, and Scripture as a whole. Our

¹²⁸ Example from Fuhr, *Inductive Bible Study*, 311.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 291.

application must be both relevant to the modern reader and faithful to the text.¹³⁰ To do this, we'll be spending time answering four big questions related to application:¹³¹

1. How can I know what is true? (discernment)
2. Who should I be like? (character)
3. What should I do? (duty)
4. To what cause should I devote my energy? (pursuit)

As we seek out meaning and application from Mark 6:30-44, we must also be aware of the Holy Spirit's work in *illuminating*, or making clear, the Scriptures to us. Our ability to understand God's Word is made possible by the Holy Spirit's work in us. When you're struggling to make sense of a passage, interpret it, or determine its application, pray that God will help you see and understand His Word. When Scripture is made clear, and you have "aha!" moments as you understand the passage, make connections, and learn something new or more about God, thank Him for helping you discover more of Him. As we've talked about before, the study of Scripture is not primarily about the transferring of knowledge or learn the dos and don'ts of life; we study Scripture to personally know and interact with the living God who loves us, sustains us, and wants us to become more like Him. Scripture is all about God, and studying Scripture is all about knowing God personally.

End this week's session in prayer, asking God to help you see how He wants you to apply His Word to your life.

¹³⁰ Fuhr, *Inductive Bible Study*, 292.

¹³¹ Questions from Daniel M. Doriani, *Putting the Truth to Work: The Theory and Practice of Biblical Application*, (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2001), 82-83. The order of the questions have been rearranged to better suit a postmodern teenage audience.

Week 5, Day 1: Discernment

For this first day of application, we will be focusing on the question of discernment: “how can I know what is true?”¹³² *Discernment* is a critical thinking skill developed by the Holy Spirit and through practice that “is the insight, the understanding, the perception, to see things as they are from God's perspective.”¹³³ The main tactic of our enemy, Satan, is to confuse you as to what is true and false (he first used this strategy in Genesis 3!). All around you, there are voices trying to tell you what they want you to believe is true. These voices can be found on social media, other people, the news, the government, books and articles, and the culture at large. But praise be to God! We are not helpless against the lies of the enemy. Through the Scriptures, we have been given “everything required for life and godliness through the knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness” (2 Peter 1:3). We can know discern what is biblical, true, and life-giving from what is unbiblical, false, and deadly through the study of God’s Word. The exercising of our discernment muscles is one of the many reasons why we study Scripture! *Read Mark 6:30-44, and answer the following questions, taking time to think through your observations and interpretation.*

From this passage, what do we know to be true about Jesus? What cultural lies about Jesus does the passage confront?

What do we know to be true about people, both believers and unbelievers? What cultural lies about people does this passage confront?

End today’s devotion in prayer, asking God to help you discern biblical truth from error.

¹³² Doriani, *Putting the Truth to Work*, 83.

¹³³ *Ibid.*

Week 5, Day 2: Character

After spending time setting the foundation for discernment, we're going to talk about our second application question: "who should I be like?"¹³⁴ At face value, this is a simple question to answer. As Christians, we are called to *conform* to Christ, or to become more and more like Jesus as we grow in our relationship with Him. To become more like Jesus Christ, we first have to know who He is and what He does. The Gospels are perfect for helping us to learn more about Jesus because we get to see, up close and personal, what Jesus prioritized, how He treated other people, how He responded to interruptions, and how He dealt with suffering. All of this helps us to know who Jesus is and how our lives can look more like Him. It is from first abiding in Jesus and knowing who we are to become in Him that we can then live that out in our everyday lives. Let's take a closer look.

Read Mark 6:30-44 and look over your responses from yesterday.

How does Jesus treat his disciples? The crowd of nonbelievers?

What does Jesus prioritize?

How does Jesus respond to an "unexpected" (to the disciples) scenario?

What is a one-word title that you would give to Jesus based on this passage?

What are some character traits seen in Jesus that you should have?

In light of Jesus' character, words, and actions in this text, what are some areas of your life where you can better reflect these qualities of Jesus?

Where else in the Gospels are these attributes of Jesus seen?

End today's devotion in prayer, asking God to make you more like Him in your character.

¹³⁴ Doriani, *Putting the Truth to Work*, 82.

Week 5, Day 3: Duty

These next two devotions we'll be focusing on what most people typically think of when they think of application: what do I do? Today, we'll be looking at our general duty as Christians, and our next devotion will focus on the specific pursuits to take. As I just mentioned, today's question is "what should I do?" or more specifically "what does the Bible teach us to do in this situation?"¹³⁵ Answering this question with a narrative passage is more difficult than with a passage from the New Testament letters because there's hardly ever an exact correlation. Unless God has something wacky in your future, you're likely never going to have to feed a small stadium of people with a single Lunchable. When reading the Gospels, it is important to pay attention to what Jesus was teaching His disciples through both His words and His actions. By understanding what Jesus wanted the disciples to learn, we can better understand what we ought to do as Christians. Remember, we are not called to work to earn our salvation, but to rest in Jesus Christ's finished work. It is from the overflow of grace that we obey.

Read through Mark 6:30-44, paying close attention to Jesus' interaction with the disciples.

What was the conversation about? What did the disciples want? How does Jesus respond?

What did Jesus want the disciples to understand about Himself?

If the disciples had immediately understood the lesson Jesus was teaching them, how would have their actions been different?

How can you apply this lesson to your own life?

Where else in Scripture is this lesson reflected?

End today's devotion in prayer, asking God to help you live out His commands and teachings.

¹³⁵ Doriani, *Putting the Truth to Work*, 82.

Week 5, Day 4: Pursuits

Today we're going to be looking at our last application question: "to what cause should I devote my energy?"¹³⁶ or "what goals should I pursue?" This application question takes everything we have learned and the previous three applications we have looked at and applies it to the specific and unique areas to which we live. For you, areas could include home and family, school, friends, church, sports, clubs, work, etc. Because my family, school, and work situations may look different from yours (I'm the oldest of two, a college senior, and I work summer camp), how I specifically apply this passage may look different than how you do it. What will be the same is the foundation of God's Word as our authority and the theological principle from our passage that gives us direction. Let me both encourage and challenge you with this statement one of my professors told me: "God doesn't need your good works, but your neighbor does."¹³⁷

Read Mark 6:30-44 and answer the following questions as you reflect on this passage.

What areas of my life are my highest priorities? Do my priorities need to change?

What are some goals that I have for my life, both right now and in the future?

How can I pursue those goals in a way that honors God?

How can I better love those around me?

How can I articulate the Gospel based on this passage?

How can I seek to change my small corner of the world towards the things of God?¹³⁸

End today's devotion in prayer, asking God to help you live out the truth in your everyday life.

¹³⁶ Doriani, *Putting the Truth to Work*, 82.

¹³⁷ Chris H. Hulshof, "Meaning and Application," Lecture presented at BIBL 350, (Liberty University: Lynchburg, VA, November 11, 2020).

¹³⁸ Hulshof, "Meaning and Application."

Week 5, Day 5: Reflection

Congratulations! You've reached the end of the inductive Bible study method process!

Take a deep breath in and out. We've covered a lot in the past few weeks, so we're going to take some time today to reflect on what we've learned and studied. Pondering and reflection are just as important in the study of God's Word as the highlighting, commentary reading, and applying.

Read through Mark 6:30-44 slowly, thinking through each word and the work you have done.

Think back to the observation stage. What are some important things you learned from the passage?

What are some important things you learned about studying the Bible in the observation stage?

Think back to the interpretation stage. What are some important things you learned from the passage?

What are some important things you learned about studying the Bible in the interpretation stage?

Reflect on the application stage from this week. What are some big takeaways from the passage?

What are some important things you learned about application this week?

How do you plan to specifically apply what you have learned from the miracle of the feeding of the 5000 to your personal life?

If you had not done the work of observation and interpretation, do you think you would have reached the same application(s) that you did this week?

How is each of the three steps important in the study of Scripture?

End today's devotion prayer, thanking God for everything He has taught you in this study.

Group Session 6

After five incredible weeks of study, we have finally made it to the last group session! In a little over a month, we have come so far in learning how to study the Bible inductively, which has been no small feat. Today we're going to review the last week of personal study, chart what's next, and wrap everything up!

On Day 1, we looked at the question of discernment.

What important truths do we gain from the passage we studied?

How can we lovingly confront the lies of the world with the truth of Scripture?

Why is it important to exercise our discernment muscles?

On Day 2, we looked at the question of character.

What did we learn about the character of Jesus from our passage?

Why is it important that our character becomes more and more like Christ's?

How is Jesus different from the other people in our passage?

On Day 3, we looked at the question of duty.

What lesson can we learn from the disciples' misunderstanding?

How does this passage inform us about how we are to live our lives?

On Day 4, we looked at the question of pursuits.

What are some priorities and goals that you have that have been shaped by this passage?

What are some areas of your life that you want to address based on our passage?

What other applications did you gain from this passage?

What Scriptures did you look at in evaluating your applications?

On Day 5, we reflected on all that we have learned over the past few weeks.

What are some major takeaways from the study of our passage?

What are some major takeaways for you from learning the inductive method?

How do you see yourself using this method in your everyday life?

So, where do we go from here? How do we incorporate this study process into our daily walk with the Lord? In a general sense, it's easy to do. When reading a passage during your personal quiet time or devotional time, you can walk through the same steps as we did over the past several weeks. However, there are a few barriers you may face in doing so that are worth discussing.

Time

The biggest barrier to incorporating the inductive method into our daily quiet time is the time and diligence that it takes. One thing that the inductive method forces us to do as we read is slow down. A lot. To understand the passage fully and effectively interpret and apply it, we need to read and reread and reread our passage multiple times, make highlights, take notes, use helpful resources, and meditate on our passage. You could easily spend an entire day going through the inductive process on one passage, and while that is a great idea to try, spending that much time is not possible for most people. One solution I have found that works for me is spending multiple days, typically a week, on the same passage, spending a couple days on each step. This allows me to give the necessary time to each step in the inductive method while also making it feasible on even my busiest days.

The One-Year Bible vs. the Inductive Method

There are so many Bible reading plans out there, but the one that is the most popular is the plan to read the whole Bible, cover-to-cover, in one year. Start Genesis 1 on January 1st, and

finish Revelation 22 on December 31st. These plans typically have you read about 3-4 chapters a day, which is a much quicker pace than a handful of verses a week. To try and use the inductive Bible study method like we've done it while on such a plan is extremely difficult, especially considering that most people struggle to finish a one-year plan in a year!

That's because the one-year reading plan and the inductive Bible study method serve two purposes. The one-year plan helps readers read through the whole Bible and get a general idea of the biblical narrative. These plans are very beneficial to people who want to get to know the whole Bible a little better and read through books they wouldn't normally read. However, the inductive method helps readers dig deeper into God's Word, taking the time to analyze each word and phrase so that they can have a deeper understanding of what the text means. Both approaches are great and serve their purposes.

If you want to use a one-year plan (or a similar plan that has you reading a chapter or more a day) and incorporate some inductive principles, try focusing on one idea or theme in your observation and interpretation. A great theme to focus on as you read through Scripture is God (He is the main character, after all!). As you read through a chapter, make note of each time God is mentioned and what the text says about Him. What does God say or do? How does the text describe God's character? Which person(s) of the Trinity are present? Keep these questions in mind as you read with a one-year plan to help you better engage with a text.

If you want to use the inductive method like we've learned it to walk through a passage or book of the Bible at a slower pace, it is perfectly okay if it takes you longer to get through a book of the Bible than if you did a one-year plan. When reading the Bible, the ultimate goal is not quantity in what you've read for the sake of quantity, but quality in how you read. It's

important that you approach Scripture purposefully, whether that purpose is to get a bird eye's view or a microscopic view of Scripture.

Where Do I Start?

This is probably the most daunting part when it comes to applying the inductive method. There are 66 books that cover thousands of chapters, and it can be incredibly intimidating. If you're looking for a place to start, why not start where we already are? Rewind back to Mark 1 and work through the Gospel, one event at a time. As you study this book, also consider how all the events relate to one another and fit within the narrative arc for the whole book. If you want to go elsewhere, try a different Gospel book or a shorter Old Testament narrative like Ruth.

Now that we've broken down some barriers, let's each create our own action plans for how we want to study Scripture!

Which strategy do you plan to use (one-year plan or focus on a single book)?

If you use a one-year plan, which plan will you use? There are many available online.

If you focus on a single book, which book will you study?

When do you plan to study the Word each day? It is best to have it at the same time every day, but it can vary based on your schedule.

How long do you plan to study each day? 30 minutes is a good place to start, but more or less time can also work. Consistency is key.

What tools do you plan to use (colored pencils, pens, commentaries, study guides, etc.)?

If you use a one-year plan, how do you plan to incorporate the inductive method?

If you focus on a single book, how do you plan to go through the inductive method with each passage? It is recommended to spend two days on each of the three steps and an additional day on whichever step you need to spend more time on.

How will you keep each other accountable? You can do this either by having a group chat where everybody shares what they studied each day or by having accountability partners that will check in each day.

How excited are you to embark on the next adventure into God's Word?!

Well, friends. We have reached the end of our journey together learning the inductive method (or is this the beginning?). While I may not know you personally, I want you to know that I am so proud of all your hard work, and I pray that these five weeks have given you a newfound appreciation for God's Word. I learned this method several years ago, and God has made me a better student of His Word because of it. I pray He does the same for you.

Before we go, let me leave you with a bit of encouragement. You don't have to do this perfectly. Do we desire to study the Bible well and study it every day? Yes, we do! But remember that the goal is not to check off of a box, to earn God's love, or to gain knowledge for knowledge's sake. God wants us to get to know Him because He already loves us. As followers of Christ, we don't work for love anymore because the Author of love now dwells within us. The ultimate goal of Bible study is to know the God who knows us and wants us to know Him. Studying the Bible is simply the means by which we spend time with Him and get to know Him. Similar to how it takes time to get to know our best friend and how continually to learn more about them, so it is with God. It takes time to know Him, and He will continue to show you more of who He is as you continue to study His Word.

And God has not left us lacking! Thousands of events within thousands of chapters that cover thousands of years that all tell the same story of a God who makes every effort to dwell with us, despite the challenges. As you explore all the nooks and crannies of Scripture, from the most familiar passages to the most obscure, I echo the prayer of Paul to the Ephesians:

“I pray that he may grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with power in your inner being through his Spirit and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. I pray that you, being rooted and firmly established in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the length and width, height and depth of God’s love, and to know Christ’s love that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. Now to him who is able to do above and beyond all that we ask or think according to the power that works in us— to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen” (Ephesians 3:16-21).

There is yet still more to uncover, my friends. There is yet still more.

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