

## ***Inductive Bible Study***

### ***What is Inductive Study?***

When I do construction work there is hardly ever a time that you will see me without my trusty tool belt around my waist. Anyone who works on projects regularly can testify to how handy it is having a variety of necessary tools for the job within reaching distance at any given time.

When studying the bible there are many methods that a Christian can use to help in their study of scripture. As you begin studying the word regularly I would urge you to learn different methods. Just like tools on a tool belt, I think you will find them handy for different scriptures as well as a great way to keep things fresh.

I like to think of Inductive Bible Study as my trusty hammer. Just like the hammer was the first tool I learned to use, inductive bible study was introduced to me in high school and revolutionized my study of the scriptures, as I was able to break apart verses and unlock the truths for me within. The Inductive Bible Study Method has been used for centuries by pastors, scholars, students, teachers of the word and parishioners everywhere. It is a quick and thorough way of breaking apart scripture to get to its meaning.

The three key steps to remember are: Observation, Interpretation, and Application. Each step helps you dig down into the meaning of the verse you are studying as well as the context in which the text is written. Finally leading you to the greatest question: "How does this verse apply to me today?"

### **Tools Needed**

- A Study Bible (with cross references, a concordance, and preferably Greek/Hebrew tools)
- A Notebook, Journal or Laptop, documenting your studies can be incredibly useful to help retain the information or have it for future reference.

### **Other Resources**

- Concordance or Bible Software Program, other tools can be valuable, but I usually steer people away from using these until you understand the process of studying the scriptures yourself. The last thing you want to do is become solely dependent on others opinions to discover truths, thereby possibly missing the opportunity for it to be "living and active" in your life.

## What It Looks Like

The best way to teach this is in person, but I wanted to have a “how to” I could make available. We are going to look at, **John 21:15-19** and point out a few things that were found as a group used Inductive Bible Study together.

*15 When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?” He said to him, “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.” He said to him, “Feed my lambs.” 16 He said to him a second time, “Simon, son of John, do you love me?” He said to him, “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.” He said to him, “Tend my sheep.” 17 He said to him the third time, “Simon, son of John, do you love me?” Peter was grieved because he said to him the third time, “Do you love me?” and he said to him, “Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.” Jesus said to him, “Feed my sheep. 18 Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were young, you used to dress yourself and walk wherever you wanted, but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will dress you and carry you where you do not want to go.” 19 (This he said to show by what kind of death he was to glorify God.) And after saying this he said to him, “Follow me.” **John 21:15-19 (ESV)***

**Observation** is gathering the facts. It is asking questions of the scripture such as **who, what, when, where**. In Bible study we gather facts like: Who is involved in the passage? Where does the story take place? To whom is the letter written? What were the circumstances of the setting? What was said? How did a certain person behave? Observation is the most frequently skipped step in Bible study. We have a tendency to read a passage and jump directly into interpretation or even application. What we must remember is that in order to understand what a passage means we must first observe what is there. Observation will be the most difficult part of Bible study to train yourself to do, but it is a key step if we want to honor Scripture and the Holy Spirit. As you study the scripture your knowledge and understanding will grow, but never stop taking time to observe the simplest of details.

Here’s an example of an observation that was made while studying John 21:15-19

*“Simon, son of John, **do you love me** more than these?” He said to him, “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.” He said to him, “Feed my lambs.” 16 He said to him a second time, “Simon, son of John, **do you love me?**” He said to him, “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.” He said to him, “Tend my sheep.” 17 He said to him the third time, “Simon, son of John, **do you love me?**” and he said to him, “Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.” Jesus said to him, “Feed my sheep.*

### **John 21:15-19 Observation (Recorded in my notebook)**

*-Why does He ask him 3x if he loves Him?  
Even as Peter answers “yes” each time*

**Interpretation** is drawing meaning and significance from the details. Interpreting Scripture is answering the *how* and *why* questions. It requires taking all the observations, looking for connections between them, finding significance in them and asking, “What does this mean?” Interpretation is where most of the wrestling and discussion will take place during Bible study. People’s faces light up when they see something for the first time or understand a passage in a new way. As observations are connected together, the main theme of the passage becomes clear and the truths begin to rise to the surface. We discover what the author meant. This unchanging truth is what we want to take up residence in our hearts. An important aspect of observation and interpretation is looking at the context of the passage—how it relates to the passages before and after it as well as the historical and cultural situation. Marking observations about these areas aids us significantly in understanding what the author was trying to communicate.

Let’s look at the interpretations the group came up with while connecting the observations they made earlier in John 21:15-19.

***John 21:15-19 Interpretations (Recorded in my notebook)***

*-Why does He ask him 3x if he loves Him?*

*-In John 18:25, Peter denies Jesus three times as Jesus had predicted he would. This could be significant to why he was asked three times. Almost in a way of building Peter back up and restoring him for not sticking up for Him when he, humanly speaking, needed him most.*

*-In Verse 15 the LOVE asked of Jesus is agapao (meaning, unconditional love, to love in a social or moral sense. It’s a Godlike love)  
the LOVE Peter responds with is phileo (meaning, to be fond of, friend, loyal A manlike love)*

*-In Verse 16 the LOVE asked of Jesus is agapao again, Peter responds with phileo*

*-In Verse 17 the LOVE asked of Jesus is phileo and this brings out the frustrated response from Peter confirming the phileo feelings towards Jesus*

In think it’s safe to say had we not looked a little more closely at the dialogue and used some cross referencing and original language tools, we would probably assume Jesus had a bit of a hearing problem and Peter had a right to be frustrated with Jesus. Once we look below the surface the true meaning of this exchange becomes clear. Jesus was asking Peter for a level of commitment Peter was unable or unwilling to give. Eventually Jesus lowers his ask to meet Peter’s current commitment level, but also challenges Peter that a deeper level of commitment will be needed to endure the things he will one day face.

I can’t emphasize enough the importance of a good, reliable Study Bible to help you in your study. One I LOVE is the Hebrew-Greek Keyword Study Bible by AMG publishers. They have a new version released in 2008 available for around \$30 on [Amazon](https://www.amazon.com). There are plenty of others out there.

**Application** is the third step and involves transitioning from meaning into action, whether the action is an inward change or an outward one—Application. It is answering the **So what?** or the **What now?** questions and the question **“What is the significance of this passage to you?”** This is the place in Bible study where you begin to think and talk about how the passage affects you and what it will mean in your own life. Is there something in this passage to affirm, avoid or accomplish in your life? Although the meaning of a passage doesn’t change, the application or the significance of the passage to individual lives may vary from person to person.

**Practically**, I have found that starting with identifying the “principles” or “timeless truths” that have risen to the surface during your study is a great way to move from interpretation into application. So what is a *timeless truth*, you ask? It is a statement supported by the text and all of scripture that is true yesterday, today, and forever. Something sturdy, strong, never failing, and that you can literally hang a life on.

Let’s look at the principles we found in John 21:15-19 and see if you can come up with an appropriate application.

*-Following Jesus requires a deeper commitment than “friend” “fan” “like” or “man-made.” It requires a love only Jesus can provide and sustain. (V18)*

*-Jesus has a specific plan and purpose for each of us to glorify him in our life and in our death. (V19)*

*-Jesus exercises patience over us as He molds us into who we are to become, but expects us to exercise faith and trust in Jesus in our decisions. (V18-19)*

*-We are called to lead in the midst of our growing into who we are to becoming. (V15-19)*

Once you have identified the principles in a passage it is easier to apply by asking the question, **how can I apply these principles or “timeless truths” to my life?**

**How would you apply these principles?** Write applications that God may be speaking to you about as you have read John 21:15-19 below.