

# Principles & Processes of Effective Bible Study

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## ***Bible Study Methods***

***Version 1.1***

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# I. Introduction

This manual is part of the training materials at Community Bible Church. The goal of this material is to give individuals a foundational knowledge of the Bible, skill in inductive Bible Study, and practice in applying the principles and processes associated with interpreting the Biblical text. The objectives of this content are:

To engage you personally in the discovery and application of biblical truths from a biblical text.

To provide you with week to week opportunities to apply the steps of Observation, Interpretation, and Application. To accomplish this you will learn how to:

- Explain the principles and apply the process of Observation.
- Explain the principles and apply the process of Interpretation.
- Explain the principles and apply the process of Correlation.
- Explain the principles and apply the process of Application.

It is not the intent of this material to provide you with an expert level of hermeneutics, rather this manual will provide with a foundational level of understanding and application that can be used continually and iteratively in all of the following courses you may take or in your personal bible study and ministries.

## II. Observation – “What does it say”

This is the most important step in Bible study and must come first. You are to saturate yourself with the content of the passage and seek to become mentally aware of all the facts contained in the passage.

### ***A. Principles of Observation***

The goal of this step is not to understand every detail but to gain a general idea of what the passage is about. The more and better observations you make now the more effective your detailed study will be later.

### ***B. Process of Observation***

***Purpose:*** What is the author’s purpose for writing this passage? In this step you should:

1. Seek to discover the writer and his purpose.
2. Seek to discover who the readers were. In some cases the writers had specific readers in mind.

***Content:*** What are the major truths which the author is presenting in order to bring out his purpose. In this step you should:

1. Observe that the major thought of the literature of the Bible is carried forth by 5 principle factors:
  - a. Persons (biographical)
  - b. Places (geographical)
  - c. Events (historical)
  - d. Ideas (logical or theological)
  - e. Time (chronological)
2. Look for particular items in content.
  - a. Key words and ideas which the author emphasizes.
  - b. The way he describes things.
  - c. The way he arranges his material.
  - d. The verbs he uses and their tenses.
  - e. The contrasts, comparisons, illustrations which he uses.
  - f. The important connectives which bring out the contrasts, comparisons, and reasons (for, but, therefore, yet, etc.)
  - g. The advise, promises, commands, and warnings given.
  - h. Words, phrases, or ideas which are repeated for emphasis.
3. Ask the following questions:
  - a. **Who** – Who are the persons mentioned in the text? (writer, recipients, God, Christ, Holy Spirit, believers, unbelievers, etc.)
  - b. **When** – Should list all the time clues in the context, whether they pertain to the action of the narrative or the thought concerning it.
  - c. **Where** – Deals with the geographic locations, whether streets, cities, territories, or space. Are the places significant or famous for other events that happened there?
  - d. **Why** – Seeks the reason for the action or thought behind the item observed. You should always seek the cause for the action that is recorded and the reason for recording it.

- e. **What** – Involves the action or content of the text. What is the purpose of it.
- f. **Wherefor** – Seeks to determine what difference it would make in our own relationship and in our relationship with others.

**Structure:** How has the author arranged his material to emphasize his purpose? This deals with the relation and interrelation of terms.

1. Recognize that the paragraph is the basic unit of thought and study. A paragraph is a group of related sentences dealing with one idea or topic.
2. Structure a title for each paragraph. It should have the following characteristics:
  - a. Brief (3-5 words)
  - b. Personal (your own words)
  - c. Memorable (easy to remember)
  - d. Unique to the paragraph
3. Between paragraphs, look for things that are:
  - a. Alike – association of similar things: “as, so like”
  - b. Unlike – association of opposites: “but, yet”
  - c. Repeated – clauses, phrases, terms, ideas
  - d. Extended – giving of greater detail
  - e. Emphasized – more space given to more important facts
  - f. Asked – questions used to prove a point
  - g. Explained – fact made either simpler or understandable
  - h. Illustrated – fact followed by example
  - i. Related – thought progressing from least to greatest, from general to specific, from specific to general, from cause to effect, from effect to cause, from alternating two topics

## Important Structural Relationships by Robert Traina

1. **Comparison** – the association of like things. The unity of Hebrews 5:1-10 is based on the use of this law. Note the “so also” in verse 5.
2. **Contrast** – the association of opposites. Romans 4 utilizes contrast.
3. **Repetition** - the reiteration of the ~ terms, phrases, clauses, etc. In Leviticus the term "holy" is repeated many times.
4. **Continuity** - the repeated use of similar terms, phrases, clauses, etc. In the law of repetition the recurring factors are exactly the same, whereas in continuity they are merely more or less alike. The series of parables in Luke 15 is an example of the latter.
5. **Continuation** - the extended treatment of a particular aspect; the carrying through to its completion of an idea or series of events. This law is sometimes related to that of continuity, but it involves extension rather than recurrence. One of the relations between Genesis 13-14 and Genesis 18-19 is that of continuation.
6. **Climax** - the arrangement of material in such a way as to progress from the lesser to the greater and ultimately to the greatest. The book of Exodus is arranged climactically, with the high point coming in 40:34-35.
7. **Cruciality** - the utilization of the principle of the pivot. The subject matter is arranged so that it turns around upon some one factor. II Samuel uses the law of cruciality, with chapters 11-12 forming the pivotal point which changes the direction of the history

recorded there.

8. **Interchange** - the exchanging or alteration of certain elements. Interchange is often employed to strengthen contrasts or comparisons. The opening chapters of I Samuel contain alternating contrasts between Hannah and her son Samuel, and Eli and his sons. Luke also uses interchange in chapters 1-2.

9. **Particularization and Generalization** - the movement from the general to the particular, and from the particular to the general. Matthew 6:1-8 is an example of particularization, and James 2 an example of generalization.

10. **Causation and Substantiation** - the progression from cause to effect and from effect to cause. Romans 1:18-32 is an excellent illustration of causation, and Romans 8:18-30 of substantiation.

11. **Instrumentation** - the setting forth of the means to an end as well as the end itself. Instrumentation thus involves the factor of purpose. The Gospel of John, in view of the author's statement in 20:30-31, exemplifies this law. The signs recorded in the book are a means to an end, namely, belief in Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God, in order to make possible eternal life. In connection with this law, one should be aware that simply because one aspect of a passage is labeled "means," it does not follow that it is less significant than that labeled "end." Often instruments are no less dispensable than their purposes. Also, it should be noted that there is a similarity between the law of instrumentation and the preceding law, since means often have a causal relation to their purpose.

12. **Explanation or Analysis** - the presentation of an idea or event followed by its interpretation. Mark 4 contains an example of this law. It is closely related to particularization.

13. **Preparation or Introduction** - the inclusion of the background or setting for events or ideas. Thereby the reader is prepared to understand that which follows by that which precedes. This kind of composition is frequently utilized in narrative literature. For example, Genesis 2:4-25 provides the situation in which the events of Genesis 3 occur.

14. **Summarization** - the employment of an abridgement or compendium either preceding or following a unit of material. Joshua 12 exemplifies this kind of structure.

15. **Interrogation** - the employment of a question or problem followed by its answer. Romans 6-7 affords an illustration of this type of arrangement.

16. **Harmony** - the effecting of unity by means of agreement. Included in this concept is the law of consistency. The law of harmony is not so much a law of composition as a law of truth. However, since truth is communicated through structural relations, the two are ultimately inseparable. Illustrations of this law are found in the harmony between disease and its remedy and the promise and its fulfillment. See, for example, the agreement between Romans 1:18-3:20 and Romans 3:21ff.

### III. Interpretation – “What does it mean”

With interpretation, you are to try to determine what the author really meant by the words which he has written. What was he seeing, feeling, thinking, and what had he experienced to make him write as he did?

#### **Basic Facts:**

1. The Bible is the word of God which has been received from God. (Revelation – 2 Timothy 3:16)
2. The words of God were written down without error by men of His selection. (Inspiration – 2 Peter 1:20-21)
3. We must be reborn and taught by the Spirit of God if we are to interpret correctly. (Illumination – 1 Corinthians 2:6-16)
4. There is one primary interpretation, but there may be many applications. (Interpretation is only a means to an end) **The one primary and true interpretation is the one intended by the author.** (Interpretation)
5. our method of interpretation must be:
  - a. Literal (based on the normal usage of the words)
  - b. Cultural (based on an understanding of the culture, history, geography)
  - c. Critical (based on adequate scriptural justification from the context of Scripture)

#### ***A. A. Principles of Interpretation***

1. Interpret Normally – give to every word the same meaning it would have in normal usage, whether employed in writing, speaking, or thinking. Figures of speech and symbols should be obvious from the text.
2. Clear passages must have priority over obscure passages. We must discover the meaning of the passage and not give one to it. Seek to determine how the people interpreted the writing in their day.
3. We must realize that the New Testament reveals additional truth not revealed in the Old Testament (Ephesians 3:3-7)
4. We must be ready to admit that there are some passages we cannot understand.
5. We must give priority to the original languages in which the Bible was written.
6. Your final interpretation must be in harmony with the teaching of the rest of Scripture. Check the interpretation with other sources.
7. We are not to expect, in every place, the whole circle of Christian doctrine to be fully stated and therefore no conclusion should be drawn from the absence of a doctrine from one passage which is clearly stated in others.

## ***B. Process of Interpretation***

**Define** – Obtain a clear definition of all the key terms used in the passage. Determine the meaning that the words give to the passage or paragraph being studied. The immediate context is extremely important.

**Compare** – Compare the passage in various translations of the Bible and note if additional light is shed on the interpretation. Look for different shades of meaning.

**Investigate** – Investigate other passages of Scripture which use the same word or term being investigated. Note the meaning given to the context in which it is found. Examine word usage in the following order of priority:

- In the same book
- In other books written by the author
- In the rest of the New Testament or Old Testament
- In the rest of the Bible

Be sure to know all possible meanings. Investigate other passages which are related to the event, idea, or thought of the passage but do not use the same words.

**Consult** – Determine the historical, geographical, and cultural background.

### **Historical / Cultural Analysis**

The meaning of the text cannot be interpreted with any degree of certainty without historical-cultural and contextual analysis.

1. Determine the general historical and cultural milieu of the writer and his audience.
  - a. Determine the general historical circumstances.
  - b. Be aware of cultural circumstances and norms that add meaning to given actions.
  - c. Discern the level of spiritual commitment of the audience.
2. Determine the purpose(s) the author had in writing a book or letter.
  - a. Note explicit statements or repeated phrases.
  - b. Observe parenthetical (hortatory) sections.
  - c. Observe issues that are omitted or focused on.
3. Understand how the passage fits into its immediate context.
  - a. Identify the major blocks of material in the book and show how they fit into a coherent whole.
  - b. Show how the passage fits into the flow of the author's argument.
  - c. Determine the perspective which the author intends to communicate noumenological (the way things really are) or phenomenological (the way things appear).
  - d. Distinguish between descriptive and prescriptive truth.
  - e. Distinguish between incidental details and the teaching focus of a passage.
  - f. Identify the person or category of persons for whom the particular passage is intended.

### **Contextual Analysis**

1. What are the major blocks of material and how do they fit together.
2. How does the passage under consideration contribute to the flow of the author's argument.
3. What was the perspective of the author.

Historical / Cultural and Contextual Analysis Steps taken from “Hermeneutics: Henry A. Virkler”

### **Lexical / Syntactical Analysis**

Lexical - Syntactical analysis is the study of the meaning of individual words (lexicology) and the way those words are combined (syntax), in order to determine more accurately the author’s intended meaning.

Although words may take on a variety of meanings in different contexts, they have but one intended meaning in any given context. The following steps should be taken when doing this kind of analysis:

1. Identify the general literary form. (narrative, prose, poetry, apocalyptic)
2. Trace the development of the author’s theme and show how the passage under consideration fits into the context.
3. Identify the natural divisions (paragraphs and sentences) of the text.
4. Identify connecting words within the paragraphs and sentences and show how they aid in understanding the author’s progression of thought.
5. Determine what individual words mean:
6. Analyze the syntax to show how it contributes to the understanding of a passage.
7. Put the results of your analysis into non-technical, easily understood words that convey the author’s intended meaning to the English reader.

Lexical / Syntactical Analysis Steps taken from “Hermeneutics: Henry A. Virkler”

### **Literary Analysis – Special Literary Methods**

- Similes / Parables
- Metaphors / Allegories
- Proverb
- Poetic Literature
- Prophetic / Apocalyptic Literature

## **IV. Correlation**

Correlation is the association of Biblical truths found in one passage to truths in other Biblical passages and its purpose is to help to develop a Biblical theology and philosophy or viewpoint of life. Correlation states that God reveals Himself to us in every part of Scripture; the parts must be related to the whole of Scripture.

### **Justification for Correlation**

1. Nature of Biblical Revelation – God reveals Himself to us in every part of the Scriptures; the parts must be related to the whole of Scripture.
  - a. Every part of the Bible is true
  - b. Truth has three aspects: it is coherent, correlated, and consistent.
  - c. The results of our Bible study must also be coherent, correlated, and consistent.
2. Nature of Biblical Interpretation
  - a. Law of Integration – The Bible is not an isolated mass of material, but an integrated message for mankind.
  - b. Law of Continuity – Every part of the Bible is related by context and by comparison.
3. Nature of the Human Mind
  - a. New truth never reveals all of itself at first exposure.
  - b. A lapse in time changes the perspective—new insights gained.
  - c. Association of ideas is in accordance with the way the mind works.

### **Benefits of Correlation**

1. Enables one to come to a more complete and accurate knowledge of the Word of God.
2. Enables one to confirm his knowledge.
3. Enables one to command or relate his knowledge.

### **Principles of Correlation**

1. Consistently look for connections between various Biblical passages, and between Scriptural statements and the data one finds outside the Scriptures.
2. Associate passages and facts whenever a relation exists between them even though they do not concern precisely the same topic.

## V. Application – “How does it work”

Application seeks to answer the question as to how it applies in my life and the in the lives of others. In other words, what does this passage of Scripture have to do with me, a person living in this generation. Application is the fruit of observation and interpretation.

### ***A. Process of Application***

1. Make a list of specific principles from the text. (What truths do the passages and context teach in words other than those used in the Biblical text?)
2. List as many applications of that principle as possible.
3. Focus on the specific application(s) that constitutes a sensitive are in your life.
4. Make a personal decision concerning the application of this passage in your life.
5. Repeat the process for steps 2-4 for each principle listed.

In seeking an application of a passage, the following areas may serve as a guide:

1. Faith
  - a. What does the Bible passage teach me about personal faith?
  - b. What do I learn about God, Jesus Christ, Holy Spirit and my relationship to them?
  - c. What specific truths should I believe?
  - d. Why should I believe these truths?
2. Sin
  - a. What sins are pointed out in my life?
  - b. Are there sins in my life which I need to confess to God?
  - c. Have I done what God told me to do concerning these sins? Are they in my life today?
3. Attitudes
  - a. What do I learn about good or bad attitudes?
  - b. What are the results of each kind?
  - c. What should be my attitude?
  - d. How can I change this attitude for the better?
  - e. What do I learn about emotions?
  - f. Is there suggested help for release from destructive emotions such as fear, worries, anxieties, hates, resentments, and jealousies?
4. Actions
  - a. What should be my actions?
  - b. Are my actions contrary to those suggested for a Christian?
  - c. Are any actions which I need to change?
5. Examples
  - a. What examples am I to follow?
  - b. What examples am I to avoid?
6. Challenges
  - a. Are there certain commands I am told to follow?
  - b. How can I follow these commands in my relationships at home, school, work, with others, with friends?
7. Promises
  - a. Are there promises which I can claim for my own?

- b. Are these promises conditional? (Do I have to do something in order to claim the promise?)
- c. Is the promise good regardless of what I do?
- d. Is the promise applicable only to the person(s) names in the passage?
- e. Is the promise given to the Jews or Gentiles?
- f. Have I seen this promise fulfilled in my own life or in the life of others?

### **Principlizing**

“Principlizing is an attempt to discover in a narrative the spiritual, moral, or theological principles that have relevance for the contemporary believer. It is based on the assumption that the Holy Spirit chose those historical incidents that are recorded in Scripture for a purpose: to give information, to make a point, to illustrate an important truth, etc. Principlizing is a method of trying to understand a story in such a way that we can recognize the original reason it was included in Scripture, the principles it was meant to teach.”

### **Trans-cultural Transmission**

- a) Discern as accurately as possible the principle behind the command.
- b) Discern whether the principle is trans-cultural or culture bound by examining the reason given for the principle.
- c) If a principle is trans-cultural, determine whether or not the same behavioral application in our culture will express the principle as adequately and accurately as the biblical one.
- d) If the behavioral expression of a principle should be changed, suggest a cultural equivalent that will express the God-given principle behind the command.
- e) If after careful study, the nature of the biblical principle and its attendant command remain in question, apply the biblical precept of humility.

## VI. Appendix

# The Grids of Human Perception

