

How to Study a Bible Passage: Observe, Interpret, Apply Worksheet

A gentle, practical way to slow down, understand a passage in context and carry its wisdom into everyday life. Move through the three steps at your own pace.

A note on Scripture

A note on the Scripture: the verse summaries in this guide are plain-English paraphrases, not quotations from a particular Bible translation. Read each passage in your preferred Bible for its full wording and context.

The three steps

1. Observe: What does the passage say?

Begin with what is actually on the page. Notice who is speaking or acting, what happens, where and when it happens, and any words or ideas that repeat. Look for details, questions, contrasts and changes. At this stage, describe what you see before deciding what it means.

2. Interpret: What did it mean?

Ask what the passage communicated to its first readers. Read the verses around it and consider the whole chapter, the book and the kind of writing. Then ask how the rest of the Bible speaks about the same idea. Let the wider context guide your understanding rather than pulling out a single line on its own.

3. Apply: What will I do with it?

Consider what the passage invites you to trust, change, practise or remember. Choose one small, specific response for this week. Application is not about earning God's love; it is a thoughtful way to respond to what you have understood.

Begin with a simple prayer

God, help me read with care, understand this passage in its context, and notice how I can live its wisdom today. Give me patience, humility and an open heart. Amen.

Helpful habits

- Read the whole chapter, not only the selected verses.
- Try more than one Bible translation to notice different wording.
- Notice the type of writing: story, poem, letter or law.
- Talk it over with others and listen with curiosity.

A worked example: Psalm 23:1–3

Plain-English paraphrase, not a Bible translation quotation.

The passage pictures God as a caring shepherd who provides, gives rest, restores strength and guides the writer along a good path.

Observe: A shepherd and sheep shape the picture. The actions include providing, resting, restoring and guiding. Interpret: In this poem, the shepherd image expresses care, protection and direction. Read the rest of the psalm to follow how the picture develops.

Apply: I might pause this week to ask for help, receive a moment of rest, or offer steady care to someone else.

Passage Study Worksheet 1

Take your time. Read the passage more than once, then write what you notice before moving towards meaning and response.

Passage: _____ Date: _____

Observe: What does the passage say?

Who is speaking, acting or being spoken about? What happens, and where or when?

Which words, ideas or images repeat? What details or contrasts catch your attention?

Interpret: What did it mean?

What might these words have meant to the first readers? What in the surrounding verses or chapter helps you tell?

What does the rest of the Bible help you understand about this theme? What is still unclear?

Apply: What will I do with it?

What might this passage invite you to trust, practise, change or remember?

What is one specific action you could take this week? Who could encourage or support you?

Passage Study Worksheet 2

Use this complete second worksheet for another passage, or return to the same text with fresh questions. Start with observation, stay with the context, then choose a response.

Passage: _____ Date: _____

Observe: What do I notice?

What is the main movement or message of this passage? Who is present, and what do they do or say?

What words or pictures seem important? Do you see a pattern, contrast, command or promise?

Interpret: What is happening in context?

What clues from the chapter, book or first readers' situation help explain the passage?

What kind of writing is this? How does that shape the way you read it? What related biblical teaching might help?

Apply: How will I respond?

Is there a truth to hold on to, a question to keep exploring, or a relationship to approach differently?

What small, realistic step will you take this week? When will you do it, and how will you reflect afterwards?
