

HOW TO DO A BIBLE STUDY ON A CERTAIN PASSAGE

Pastor Bob Johnson, Grace Point Church

A "passage" can be any length, but it is usually helpful to observe the natural paragraph divisions within a chapter. You will be able to study in greater depth if you limit yourself to a paragraph (or portion of a paragraph) at a time.

1. Go through the passage by words, phrases, and sentences, writing down observations and thoughts that come to mind.

Often, insights can be gained by looking up the definitions of words you do not fully understand.

Also, pay close attention to the nouns. Who is speaking? To whom is the passage speaking? Are the nouns singular or plural?

Along with the nouns, pay close attention to the verbs. What tense are they? Is there any significance in the order of the verbs?

The above observations and thoughts can be called 'then statements' since they deal with the time the passage was written.

2. From these thoughts and observations, discover principles that are always true. (often your initial observations will fall under this heading).

THESE TRUTHS OR PRINCIPLES CAN BE CALLED 'ALWAYS STATEMENTS'.

3. From these truths, write out how you can apply this truth to your life.

A written application should be:

- **PERSONAL:** not general. Use the personal pronouns, "I", "me", "my", "mine".
- **PRACTICAL:** make sure that you can actually do what you have written. Be specific. Do not be so idealistic or so comprehensive that it cannot be done.
- **MEASURABLE:** state your application so that you will know whether or not you have done it. Include a time limit so that you will do it within a certain time period.

Suppose you are studying John 13:34-35. Your personal application would not be: "Christians should love each other". Nor would you just say, "I need to be more loving to the Smith family." That is not measurable. You will not know when you have applied what God has spoken to you about. You must go one step further: "... this week we will have them over for dinner, and next week invite them to go to the ball game with us."

There are three basic types of application that can be made:

- 1) to know something
- 2) to be something
- 3) to do something

It is possible to make a written application for every truth discovered - but it is not always practical to do so. However, personal application is the major objective of Bible Study. James 1:22 says, "Do not merely listen to the word ... do what it says." So, pray that God will speak to you concerning the application He wants you to make. (Often, the application is a decision to do a certain thing in a future situation.)

Written application can be called 'now statements'.

These first three steps mentioned above can be summarized by the three words:

- Then (observations about Bible passage)
- Always (principles that transfer to today)
- Now (applications to my everyday life)

4. Find a cross-reference for each truth or principle.

Occasionally, you will have a thought or an observation which cannot be verified by other Bible passages. Finding a cross-reference that supports your "always statements" or principles found in your initial Bible study is a safeguard from coming to a wrong conclusion. Also, cross references will give additional light to truth you have discovered.

THE FOLLOWING IS AN EXAMPLE OF USING I KINGS 11:1-3 AS THE PASSAGE BEING STUDIED.

1. THEN: From the text it is clear that Solomon loved many women.

ALWAYS: We have the capacity to have a romantic love for more than one person. (Gen. 25:1, Gen. 35:23-26, Gen. 36:1-3)

NOW: Being single, knowing that I can love again, I will break my engagement with Karen because she does not have a heart for God. I will talk to her Saturday night.

or Being married, and knowing that I need to be careful about getting emotionally involved with more than one woman, I will be friendly with Susan (who I work with) but will watch my words and actions around her to guard my heart. I will also ask John, my close friend, to check up on me about how I am relating to Susan.

2. THEN: Solomon's heart was turned away from God.

ALWAYS: Many people who start out walking with God get side-tracked by a romantic relationship outside of God's will.
(1 Kg. 3:3-9, Judges 13:24, Judges 16:4, 1 Cor. 15:33)

NOW: I will no longer let dating keep me from being involved in Christian ministry and growth. This week, I will begin attending a small group to be more balanced in my relationships and learn how to grow closer to God for myself.

The follower are some questions to ask regarding a Bible passage to help you understand and apply what it says:

1. What does it say? (paraphrase each verse)
2. What did you like about the passage?
3. What did you dislike about this passage?
4. What did you not understand?
5. What does the Bible say in other places? (cross references)
6. What did you learn about God?
7. What is one thing to apply in light of this passage?
8. What phrase, thought, or sentence from this passage would you like to think about more this week?