
Ephesians: An Inductive Study

Walking out your identity in Christ



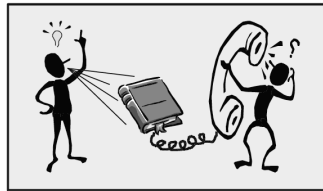
TWO APPROACHES TO BIBLE STUDY

1. DEDUCTIVE APPROACH

- In this approach you come to the Bible *with a conclusion* and seek Bible verses to support it
- You have come to conclusions *before* reading the whole of Scripture in context
- In a sense you are *dictating to* the Bible rather than letting it speak for itself

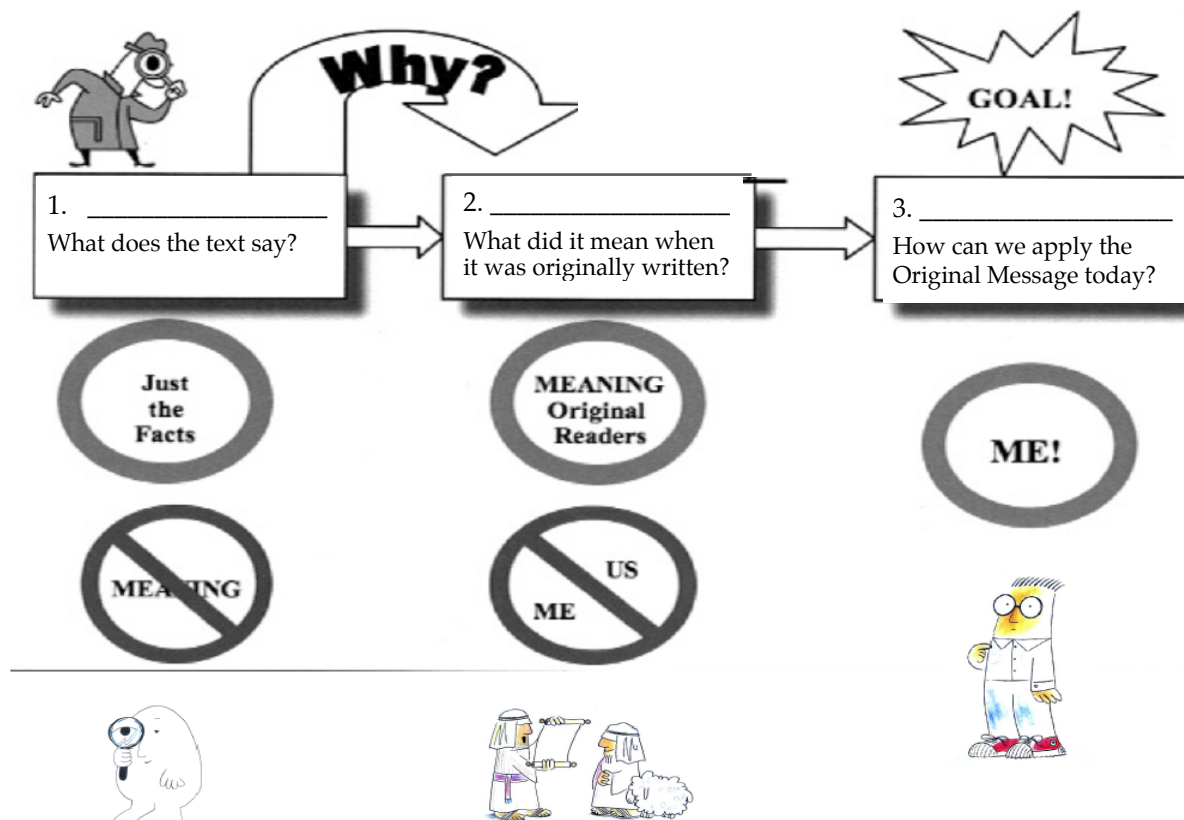
2. INDUCTIVE APPROACH

- In this approach you lay down **pre-conceived ideas** to observe what the Bible says
- You make conclusions *after* reading the whole of Scripture in **context**, based off of what you have observed
- You let the Scripture speak for itself



The **Inductive Approach** to Bible Study *first gathers evidence from the Bible* before coming to conclusions about what the Bible says. This is the approach we will take in this booklet.

3 STEPS OF INDUCTIVE BIBLE STUDY



THE IMPORTANCE OF CONTEXT

The Bible is a collection of 66 books written by at least 40 different authors between 1400BC and AD100. That was a long, long time ago! Therefore, in order to understand what the Bible means (which we do in **interpretation**) it will be important for us to consider why the **Author** wrote and what he was trying to communicate to his **Original Reader**. **Context** helps us do this. To make sure we are interpreting the message as the Author intended it, we need to consider two types of context:

- (1) **Literary Context:** The words/phrases that come immediately before and after a particular passage. They directly impact the meaning of a passage. To gather literary context we will:
 - look at the verses before and after a passage
 - look at the main message of the book
 - look at what the Bible says in other places regarding a particular topic
- (2) **Historical Context:** The historical background of the Author and Original Reader (the person/people the book was originally written to). To gather historical context we will:
 - gather information from the Bible about the Author and Original Readers (**internal evidence**)
 - gather information from outside sources about the cultural and historical setting of the Author and Original Readers (**external evidence**)

Interpreting in light of the literary and historical context is very important. In inductive Bible study we have a saying: *"The Bible was not written TO us...but it was written FOR us."* This means that when interpreting what the Bible means we must first consider the people that it was written to. Only then can we discover how the Original Message **applies** to us today.

OVERVIEW OF THE STEPS:

LAYING THE GROUNDWORK

STEP #1 - Read the whole book in one sitting, try to find the author's **Main Message**.
This step helps you understand the literary context (see pages 5).

STEP #2 - Find the Historical Background of the book. This step helps you understand the historical context (see pages 6-8).

DISCOVERING THE BOOK CHAPTER BY CHAPTER (see pages 9-16)

STEP #3 - Observation

STEP #4 - Interpretation

STEP #5 - Application

STEP 1: MAIN IDEA WORKSHOP

(GATHERING LITERARY CONTEXT)

First, read the whole book out loud and in one sitting.

Second, practice the step of **observation** to help you understand the **Main Message** and **Literary Context**. Go through each chapter and observe any **repeated words** or **ideas**. Then, summarize the chapter in one sentence. Record your findings in the chart below.

| REPEATED WORDS AND IDEAS | ONE-SENTENCE SUMMARY |
|--------------------------|----------------------|
| Ephesians 1: | |
| Ephesians 2: | |
| Ephesians 3: | |
| Ephesians 4: | |
| Ephesians 5: | |
| Ephesians 6: | |

Using what you observed above, what do you think the main message of Ephesians is? In other words, if you had to explain the book in one sentence, how would you do so?

STEP 2: HISTORICAL BACKGROUND WORKSHOP

(GATHERING HISTORICAL CONTEXT)

To better understand Ephesians, it helps to know the historical situation the book was written to address (that of the **Author** and **Original Readers**). This is **historical context**. Bible dictionaries give information about culture and significant events that are not explicitly explained in Scripture. However, we *first* want to see what the Bible tells us about the **historical context**. It tells us more than we might think! In this step we will continue to carefully **observe**, remembering that reading Scripture is like listening to one side of a phone conversation. We “hear” the voice of the Author; from what he writes we try to fill in the side of the Original Reader, determining the situation the Author was writing to address.

AUTHOR:

Who wrote this book? _____ (always include verse references)

What does the book say about him (about his job, how he feels, who is with him, etc.)?

Where is he? _____

What book of the Bible might help us determine when Paul was in prison? _____

Acts records 3 locations Paul was in prison:

1. Philippi, for one night (Acts 16:11-40). This is approx. AD 49-50.
2. Caesarea, for two years (Acts 23:31-26:32, especially 24:27). This is approx. AD58-60.
3. Rome, for two years (Acts 28:11-31, especially 28:30-31). This is approx. AD60-62.



Based on this info, where do *you* think Paul was when he wrote this book. Explain why:

ORIGINAL READER:

Who was the book written to? _____ (include verse references)

Does it seem like the Ephesian church is having any struggles? What are they? (Consider what he is instructing them to do for insight into what their struggles might have been.)

There is a lot about Ephesus in Acts! Read each of the stories carefully to **observe** (and **interpret** a little) what the story tells you about the city of Ephesus and its people.

| OBSERVE what happens in Ephesus and INTERPRET what this shows about Ephesus | |
|---|--|
| Acts 19:8-10 | |
| Acts 19:11-20 (note especially how the miracles are described in v11) | |
| Acts 19:23-41 | |
| Acts 20:17-38 | |

SUMMARY:

Based on your Main Idea and Historical Background workshops (steps 1 and 2), why did Paul write to the Ephesians? Is there a verse from Ephesians that summarizes this idea?

MORE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND:

We started our research on the **historical context** of Ephesians in the Bible by gathering **internal evidence** - in Ephesians and Acts. After discovering what the Bible says, use that information to decide what will be helpful to look up in a Bible dictionary to better understand *why* Paul is writing. Using what we **observed** about Ephesus from Acts as a starting point, the following chart provides more background information obtained from Bible dictionaries, which we call **external evidence**.

| Observation | Historical Background - External Evidence |
|--|---|
| Acts 19:8-10 <i>Both Jews and Greeks became believers while Paul preached in Ephesus</i> | There was a Jewish presence in Ephesus (note the synagogue), but it would have been a largely Gentile city. As Paul evangelized Asia Minor from Ephesus, many Jews became Christians, but also many Gentiles. The flood of Gentile converts into the church would have created tension with the Jews, as the Jews had strict laws about food and morality (whereas the Gentiles did not). The Gentile Christians' lack of appreciation for the Jewish heritage of the faith would have prompted serious Jew-Gentile tensions in the church (<i>Dictionary of Paul and His Letters</i> , Eds. Ralph Martin, Gerald F Hawthorne, Daniel G. Reid, 146). |
| Acts 19:11-20 <i>Paul performed extraordinary miracles. Evil spirits were cast out. The people burned magic books worth 50,000 pieces of silver.</i> | The value of the magic books that were burned would be about 6,000,000USD today (<i>ESV Study Notes</i> on Acts 19:19). The religious background of the Gentiles in Ephesus involved mystery religions, magic and astrology. People in this region were very afraid of evil spirits and that fear would have been something they struggled with even after becoming Christians. Newly converted Christians would have wondered what Christ's power was in relationship to the evil spirits and cosmic powers that they were familiar with. Paul explains to them that Christ is "far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come" (Eph 1:21) (<i>Dictionary of Paul and His Letters</i> , Eds. Ralph Martin, Gerald F Hawthorne, Daniel G. Reid, 146-147). |
| Acts 19:23-41 <i>The riot over the disrepute of the goddess Artemis.</i> | The Artemis cult was the most prominent and significant cult in Ephesus. It was closely connected with the practice of magic in the region. The temple of Artemis was grand and beautiful, which led it to be classified as one of the seven wonders of the ancient world (<i>Dictionary of Paul and His Letters</i> , Eds. Ralph Martin, Gerald F Hawthorne, Daniel G. Reid, 150). The temple surroundings played a central part in the economic prosperity of the city, even acting as a bank (<i>ESV Study Notes: Introduction to Ephesians</i>). |
| Acts 20:17-38 <i>Paul's farewell to the Ephesians. It seems they were very close. He warns them against false teachers.</i> | Paul's letter to the Ephesians was written <u>after</u> his warning to look out for false teachers here in Acts, but <u>before</u> his letters to Timothy, who served Ephesus a decade or so later. 1 and 2 Timothy attest to the presence of false teachers who were ravaging the church for their own gain (See 1 Tim. 1:19–20; 4:1–3; 2 Tim. 1:15; 2:17–18; 3:1–9.) (<i>ESV Study Notes</i> on Acts 20:29-30). |

STEPS 3, 4, 5:

OBSERVATION, INTERPRETATION & APPLICATION

(DISCOVERING THE TEXT CHAPTER BY CHAPTER)

In this part of the booklet, you will use the inductive method to go through each chapter by:

- (1) **Observing** a particular detail of it.
- (2) **Interpreting** what it meant to the Original Reader and Author by using your understanding of the literary and historical context (gathered in steps 1 and 2) and;
- (3) Discovering **application** principles for your life today!

Special Note:

In the following pages you will be asked to observe specific details in each chapter (such as **repeated phrases**, **connectives** and **commands**). The details you are asked to observe are ones that will be particularly helpful for understanding the **Main Message** of that chapter. However, you may also observe (as well as interpret and apply) each particular detail throughout the entire book, which will help shed even more light on Paul's message in Ephesians. The more you observe, the more you will see and understand!

As well, you will be asked specific interpretation and application questions. These are by no means the only ones that could be asked! The heart behind these questions is to give you a helpful starting point for taking observation into interpretation and application. But you are encouraged to use these questions as a springboard to asking more (and different) questions, deepening and developing your interpretations and applications. Create your own specific variation of the following kinds of interpretation questions:

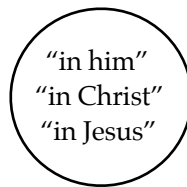
- Why did the **Author** write this? What does this demonstrate about him?
- Why did the **Original Readers** need to know this? How would this truth affect their culture? What does this show them about God and why is that significant?
- Why is *this* said *here*? Consider what's before and after the passage, i.e. **Literary Context**.

These workshops are designed to help you to inductively approach the Scriptures and may be modeled (and modified) in the study of other books.

EPHESIANS 1 WORKSHOP: Observing Repeated Phrases

OBSERVATION:

Write a list or draw a **mind map** diagramming all the ideas that are connected to the **repeated phrase** “in him,” “in Christ,” or “in Jesus” in Ephesians 1. Once complete, circle all the purpose statements (i.e. the ones that indicate what this is for).



INTERPRETATION:

Considering the spiritual atmosphere of Ephesus, how would this encourage the church? What do the purpose statements communicate to the Ephesians?

APPLICATION:

Being also “in him,” these statements are relevant for the church today! Do you live as if being “in him” were your core identity? Which aspect do you struggle with the most? What can you do to grow in this belief?

EPHESIANS 2 WORKSHOP: Observing Connectives

OBSERVATION:

What ideas come before and after each of the **connectives** below? For some, the statements immediately before and after will be enough; for others you may want to include more text from a broader **context**.

_____ But (contrast)(2:4) _____

_____ so that (purpose) (2:7) _____

_____ For (reason) (2:10) _____

_____ Therefore (result)(2:11) _____

_____ but (contrast)(2:13) _____

_____ that (purpose) (2:15) _____

_____ So then (result) (2:19) _____

INTERPRETATION:

(1) Pick one of the above connectives and interpret why Paul would connect these ideas for the Ephesians:

(2) Consider how the connective in 2:11 connects the ideas in these 2 paragraphs. What are the major ideas that are connected? Why is it important that they are connected?

APPLICATION:

Are there any Christians (who are also “in him”) that you find it difficult to love/be with? Do the truths in Ephesians 2 challenge you to love this person/group? What steps can you take towards this person/group?

EPHESIANS 3 WORKSHOP: Observing Who, Repeated Word, Connectives

| OBSERVATION (include verses) | INTERPRETATION: | APPLICATION |
|---|---|--|
| <p>Who - List everything this chapter tells you about Paul (Hint: look for pronouns)</p> | <p>What does this show about Paul's ministry? Why would Paul want the Original Readers to know this?</p> | <p>What can leaders learn from Paul's example?</p> |
| <p>Repeated Word - "Mystery." What is said about it?</p> | <p>What does "mystery" mean to Paul? Why do the Original Readers need to understand this mystery?</p> | <p>What is the significance of this "mystery" for the church today?</p> |
| <p>Repeated Word/Connective - "that" (3:14-19). What ideas does Paul connect? Do they indicate reasons, contrasts or purposes?</p> | <p>What are the purposes Paul prays for (hint: there are 4)? Why do the Original Readers need them?</p> | <p>What does this teach you about prayer? What does this prayer teach you about you?</p> |

EPHESIANS 4:1-5:14 WORKSHOP: Observing Commands

OBSERVATION:

Ephesians 4:1-16 - Observe the **repeated idea** of growth/maturity:

Ephesians 4:17-5:14 - Observe **commands**. Try to put them into 2 categories: (1) *What not to do* - no longer walking as Gentiles (4:17); and (2) *What to do* - walking as imitators of God (5:1).

INTERPRETATION:

Pick one of the commands you observed to interpret:

(1) How would obeying it help the **Original Reader** grow up into maturity?

(2) Why would Paul give the Original Reader the message of Ephesians 1-3 before giving this command?

APPLICATION:

Do you struggle with obeying this command? How can you grow in this area? How does the message of Ephesians 1-3 help you to grow in walking in obedience in this area?

EPHESIANS 5:15-6:9 WORKSHOP: Observing Commands, Lists & Context

OBSERVATION:

Look carefully then how you walk (5:15)! Observe 3 **contrast-commands** of how to do this (5:15-18):

- _____ but _____
- _____ but _____
- _____ but _____

After the last contrast there is a **list** of 4 ways that being filled with the Spirit would look like (5:19-21):

- 1)
- 2)
- 3)
- 4)

The last item on the above list indicates that being filled with the Spirit looks like “submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ” (5:21). After this Paul explains what this looks like for the different members of the Ephesian church. Observe what this will look like for each group:

- Wives (5:22-24):
- Husbands (5:25-33):
- Children (6:1-3):
- Fathers (6:4):
- Bondservants (6:5-8):
- Masters (6:9):

INTERPRETATION:

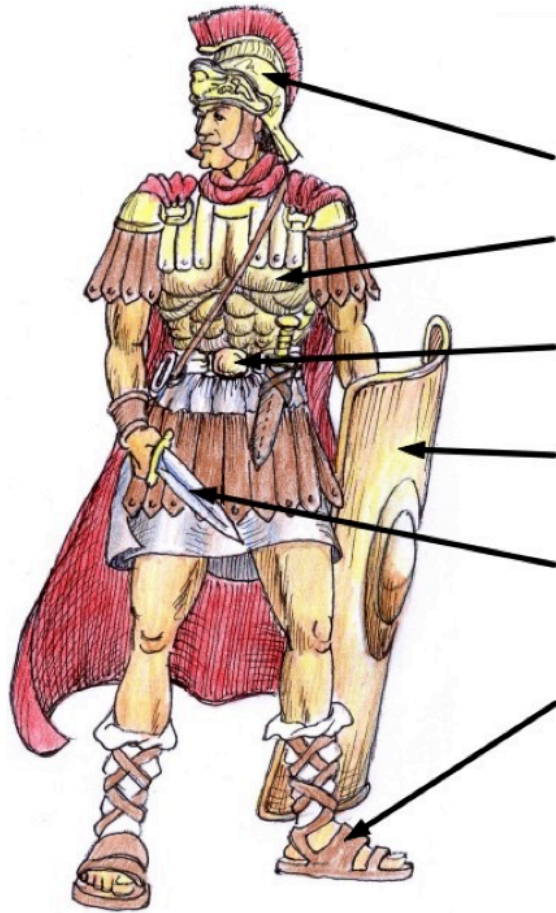
How would walking out these commands challenge/encourage each member of the Ephesian church? How would walking this out show them to be filled with the Spirit to their culture? What might be the result of each group “watching how they walk”?

APPLICATION:

What can the church today learn from the way Paul instructs this church to relate to each other? How will this enable each member of today’s church to be a light to our culture?

EPHESIANS 6:10-24 WORKSHOP: Observing the Armour of God

OBSERVATION:



INTERPRETATION:

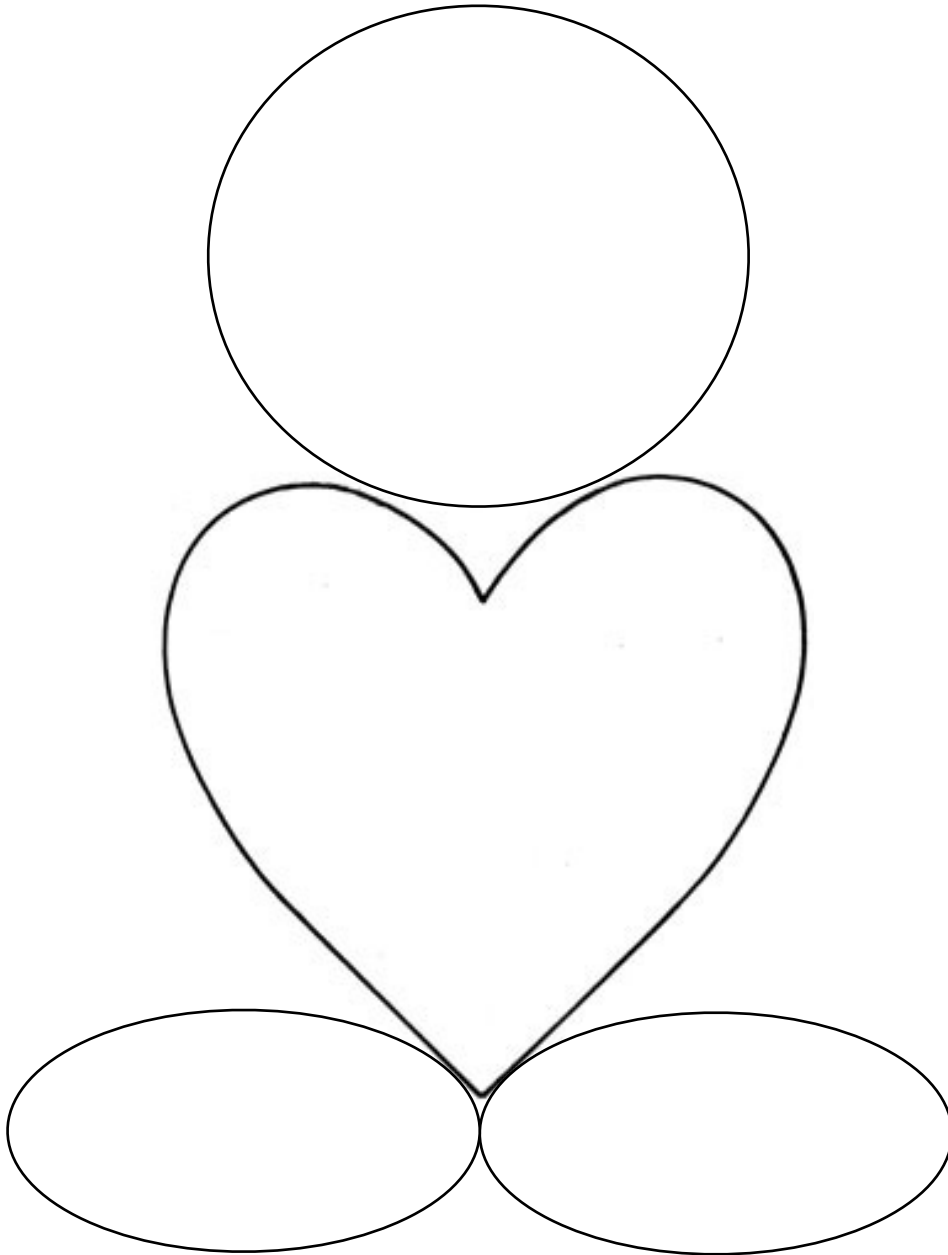
Has Paul said anything about these ideas earlier in the letter that would help you interpret what it would look like for the Ephesians to practically put on this armor? Why would Paul use this illustration for this church?

APPLICATION:

Are you aware of having on every piece of your armor? Which is the strongest part? Which is the weakest?

FINAL APPLICATION

After you have studied an entire book it's good to *reflect* on what you learned, to *pray* about the truths you need greater revelation of, and to *commit to doing something* to put its message into practice. This you will do below.



Head:

Write down one or two new things you learned during your study. Explain the ideas that were new to you.

Heart:

What truths in this book impacted you at a heart level? Or what truths need to move from your head to your heart? Spend time in prayer about these things.

Feet:

What is something you can do to put the message of Ephesians into action? How will you do that this week?

DEFINITIONS

application:

The third step of inductive Bible study: How can the Original Message be applied today? Tries to find principles from the Original Message in interpretation and discover how they can be applied to similar situations in the 21st century.

author:

In inductive Bible study it refers to the man (or woman) God used to write the book to a particular Original Reader. God is the divine author of Scripture, but he used human vessels in the writing of his Word.

commands:

A type of observation. When the Author tells the Original Reader to do or not do something.

connective:

A type of observation. They establish relationships between thoughts and ideas. Connectives are not important in and of themselves, rather because they indicate that you need to consider the idea that came *before* it with the idea that comes *after*. It is important to determine the type of relationship the connective is establishing before interpreting the ideas they connect. There are at least 4 different types:

- 1) Reasons: what comes after shows the reason for what came before - *because, for*
- 2) Result: what comes after shows the result of what came before - *so then, therefore*
- 3) Purpose: what comes after shows the purpose of what came before - *so that, in order that*
- 4) Contrast: what comes after shows a contrasting idea to what came before - *but, however, yet*

context:

The setting for an event, statement, or idea. Since ideas can only be understood in terms of their context, it needs to be considered in order to interpret Scripture appropriately. Inductive Bible study considers two types of context: literary and historical.

contrast:

A type of connective-observation. Usually indicated by the use of "but" or "yet."

deductive approach to Bible study:

Starts with one's own pre-conceived ideas (which can come from from others' teachings or one's own imagination) and tries to prove them by finding Bible verses to support them.

external evidence:

Any information gathered from sources *outside* the Bible (Bible dictionaries, commentaries, encyclopedias, etc.) to help you understand the situation of the Author and Original Reader.

feet:

In the final application of a book, where you record how you will practically and specifically put the message of the book into action that week and beyond.

Gentile:

Any person who is not physically descended from Abraham (i.e. Greek, Roman, Germanic, etc.). In the Old Testament, the implication was that Gentiles were not God's people.

head:

In the final application, where you record new ideas that you learned during your study.

heart:

In the final application of a book, where you record what ministered to your heart and spend time in prayer about these things.

historical context:

The culture and historical background of the Author and Original Reader (the person/people the book was originally written to). It should be considered before interpreting what the passage means. First try to identify relevant historical information from the Bible by observing closely the book you are studying and other books of the Bible. This is called *internal evidence*. Acts is a good resource for historical context for many of the Letters in the New Testament. Kings is a good resource for historical context for many of the Prophets in the Old Testament. Use the historical background information you find in the Bible to lead you to what might be good to research in a Bible dictionary. Information you find in a source other than the Bible is called *external evidence*.

inductive approach to Bible Study:

Starts with the Bible first, gathering evidence before coming to conclusions about what the Bible means. Studies the Scriptures considering literary and historical context. Uses 3 steps to do this: observation, interpretation and application.

internal evidence:

Any information gathered from *inside* the Bible (the book being studied, Acts, Kings, or any other book of the Bible) to help you understand the situation of the Author and Original Reader.

interpretation:

The second step of inductive Bible study: What did it mean to the Original Reader? or What did it mean when it was Originally Written? Asks "why" questions of what has been observed and tries to answer them using Literary and Historical Context.

list:

A type of observation. When a number of connected ideas are written one after another.

literary context:

The words and phrases that come immediately before and immediately after a particular passage. They can have a direct impact on the meaning of a passage. They must be considered when interpreting what a passage means. Broader literary context considers verses in light of whole books and what is said in the whole of Scripture.

main message:

The one (or two) main idea(s) that the Author wanted the Original Readers to take away from the book. If the book was summarized in one sentence, what would it be?

mind map:

With a central idea placed in the middle, visually arrange associated ideas around it to demonstrate how it connects and flows into other ideas.

observation:

The first step of inductive Bible study: What does the text say? Gathers facts from the text without asking any “why” or meaning questions.

original reader:

May also be referred to as the OR. This is the person or group to whom a book of the Bible was originally written. It addresses a particular problem(s) that they had and was written in a way that they would have understood. Therefore we must take time to get to know who the Original Reader of a book is before we interpret what the book means.

pre-conceived idea:

An idea that you have about something before you have evidence if it being true (which doesn't necessarily mean that it isn't!)

repeated idea:

A type of observation. When different words that express a similar idea are repeated more than once. If the ideas are repeated throughout the entire book it may be considered a theme (and themes are important because they show us what is most important to the Author).

repeated word/phrase:

A type of observation. A word or phrase that is repeated more than once. If it is repeated throughout the entire book it may be considered a theme. Repeated words and themes are important to observe because they show us what is most important to the Author.

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