



by Peter Krol & Jenny Carrington

CAN ORDINARY PEOPLE LEARN TO STUDY THE BIBLE?

People with Bibles don't always know how to use them. They know how to collect study guides, commentaries, sermon audio, study Bibles, lecture notes, magazines, blog feeds, and inspiring quotes. They're good at absorbing and repeating what they're taught. But the average Christian alone with a Bible is as helpless as the average guitarist stuck with real sheet music.

Now don't get me wrong: Study guides are a crucial part of Christian education. Their role in Bible study is like that of a tee in the sport of baseball.

The tee is the first guidepost for a child learning to play the sport. It assures the child that he can hit the ball and not fear it will hit him. It defines where to stand, where to swing the bat, and when to run. It's a good friend and capable mentor.

As the athlete develops, the tee endures as a tool. Even the pros use tees to help them perfect the mechanics of batting. However, the tee is not part of the big game. While the tee trains and refines, it prepares players for the game of baseball, and then it gets out of the way.

In the same way, decent guides shape Bible students. They assist young Christians in practicing the basics. They embolden new leaders by providing a ready-made structure for discussion groups. They develop mature believers by honing their understanding of Scripture and keeping them connected with the insights of others.

But this booklet will help you learn to play the game without a tee. It will help you learn to study the Bible for yourself.

WHO IS THIS BOOKLET FOR?

The Reformation and its offspring put Bibles in the hands of ordinary people, but these hands are often clumsy in their craft. So explanatory materials have multiplied, fueling in the hearts of God's people an increasing fervor for reading God's word. And God willing, this fervor will never abate. If you are among those who share this fervor, this booklet is for you.

1. Are you a beginner who loves God and his word?

Perhaps you see others draw close to God through his word, and you want in on it. You faithfully attend church services, but you're certain you could never do what the pastor or leader does. So you keep listening and watching. You'd be delighted to experience richer insight; you just don't know where to start.

2. Are you a mature Christian who wants to internalize your Bible study skills?

Churches are packed with people who have a daily quiet time with their Bible, journal, and workbook or study guide. These folks have experienced decent Bible study, and they pretty much get the basics. But they want to be able to do it on their own. Does this describe you? Maybe you're a pastor who limits sermon preparation to reading commentaries. You're used to riding with training wheels, but you're itching to pop them off and let loose.

3. Are you a leader who longs not only to teach but also to equip?

You have an effective ministry. People come to Christ. People grow in Christ. People lead others to Christ and engage their communities. The church or small group thrives. But the ministry centers on you, the leader. People come to you with questions; they get answers and go on their way. You desire a better legacy for the Lord—one that produces disciple-making disciples—but you don't quite know how to reproduce yourself. You do what you do instinctively, and you're not sure how to package it up for wholesale distribution.

This booklet offers what each of these three groups need: a simple and sensible Bible study method. Some might read the booklet from beginning to end to understand the entire model. Others will refer to it to answer particular questions:

Why does our method matter?

How do I find the motivation not only to read but also to study the Bible?

I think I've seen everything in a text, but I'm not sure where to go now; what else can I observe?

What do I do with my observations?

How do I interpret difficult passages?

How do I learn to discover the authors' main points?

How do I see Jesus in any Bible passage?

How can I move past vague principles to apply the Bible to the details of life?

How do I apply the same text to a different audience?

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1. A BETTER METHOD OF BIBLE STUDY



YOU ALREADY HAVE A METHOD

Perhaps the idea of a method makes you nervous. But like it or not, you already have a method for Bible study. You just might not be aware of it yet.

Some methods are unintentional and informal. For example:

The Divination Method

Open the Bible
Drop your finger into a random place
Read what you find
Trust this is God's will for you today

The Support Group Method

Read a passage of the Bible
Close the Bible
Consider (or discuss, in a group situation) how you feel about what you just read

The Prayerful Method

Ask God to bring to mind a passage of the Bible that will address your current problem or need
Listen to what thoughts are put in your mind
Look at those passages for encouragement or help



Other methods, however, are quite intentional and formal. For example:

The Cross-Reference Method

Read a passage of the Bible

Highlight the key words or phrases in that passage

Look up another passage that this one reminds you of (the cross-references in the middle column of your Bible really help with this)

Look up another passage that the second one reminds you of

Look up another passage that the third one reminds you of

Repeat until you run out of time

The Word Study Method

Decide which topic you'd like to study in the Bible

Identify one or more keywords that represent your topic

Search the whole Bible for passages that use those keywords

Read each verse that comes up

Compile the components of your topic

Live in light of what you learned

The Expert Method

Read a passage of the Bible

Read a commentary on that passage of the Bible

Believe and act upon what the commentator wrote

Here's the point: Everyone who reads the Bible has a method for studying the Bible. What is your method? Are you even conscious of how you study the Bible?

Even if you identify your method, is it a good one? Unfortunately, many methods don't result in correct interpretation. If the Bible is God's word to us, shouldn't we make sure we understand it?



THERE IS A BETTER METHOD

This booklet is all about an old Bible study method that has had many names, but today often uses the acronym OIA:

Observation—what does it say?

Interpretation—what does it mean?

Application—how should I change?

You can restate these three steps as “what,” “why,” and “so what.” Or again, as “what the original author said,” “what that meant to the original audience,” and “what it means in our context.”

The OIA method has many benefits. It teaches us to hear the text and respond to what we’ve read. It trains us in critical thinking and clear communication. It interests postdocs, preschoolers, and everyone in between. It can be learned in five minutes and perfected over a lifetime.

OBSERVATION

*Genre, words, grammar,
structure, mood*

INTERPRETATION

Q&A (what, why, so what?)

**AUTHOR'S
MAIN
POINT**

Gospel Connection

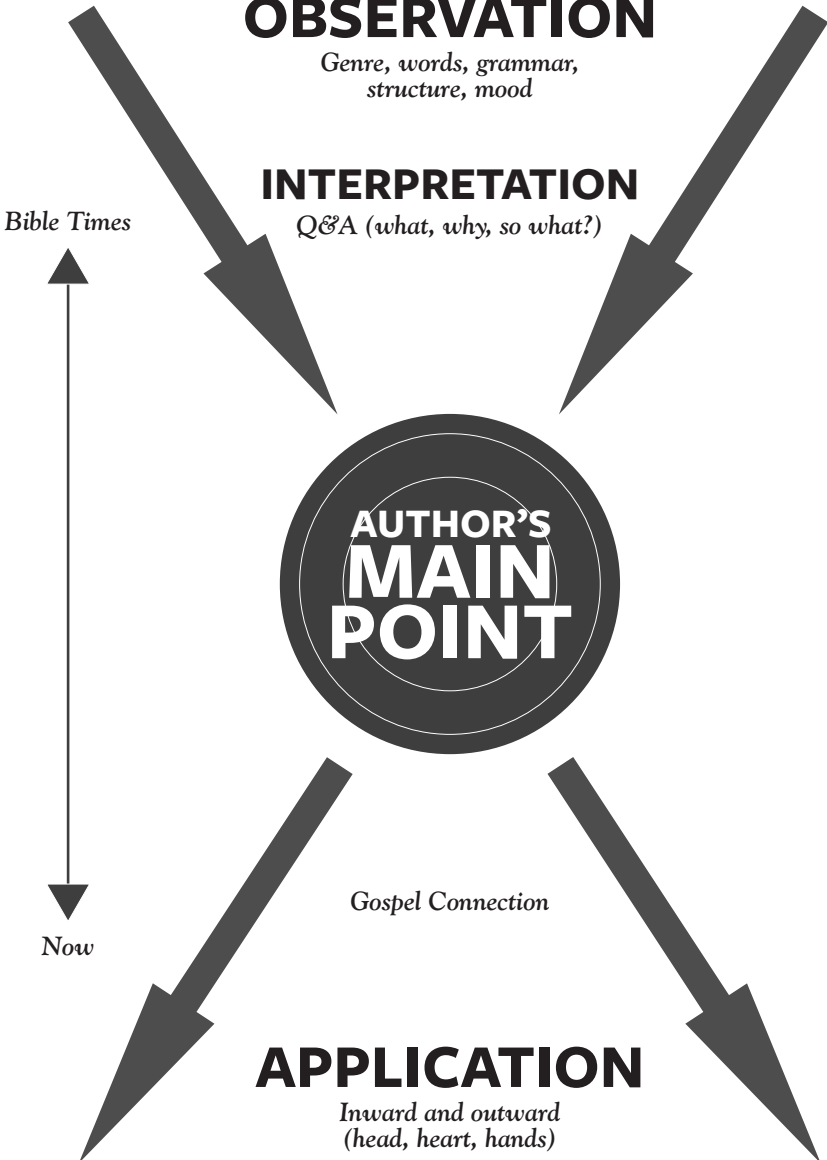
APPLICATION

*Inward and outward
(head, heart, hands)*

Bible Times



Now





THE OIA METHOD: IT'S WORTH IT

Jonathan spent a year learning OIA Bible study skills and then helped his small group re-focus on the Bible. Before that, the group would bounce from one study guide to the next, believing themselves incapable of handling the Scripture without expert guidance. But Jonathan suggested they simply read a book of the Bible and discuss it. So they did, and I believe they're still doing it.

Dorothy received six months of OIA training in adult Sunday school and in the process contracted a contagious love for Scripture. This elderly widow had served faithfully in the church for decades. She believed the gospel and never grew out of her need to hear it preached, but she had grown accustomed to being told what to think and do as a Christian. Learning how to study God's word herself was like reconnecting with an old friend.

Ming came to know Christ, learned to study the Bible, and wanted to share her new faith with her father, a Communist official back in China. She didn't have access to any specialized resources, so she simply asked him if he'd like to read and discuss the Gospel of John with her weekly. Armed with a webcam, a broadband internet connection, and the sword of the Spirit, she introduced him to the Word made flesh.

What prevents you from being able to open your Bible at any time and know what to do with it? Imagine if your Bible reading didn't feel like the perpetual first date, with little more than awkward silence and uncomfortable communication.

The OIA method is more than a good idea; it's a tool to help you better know the Word, the Truth, and the Life.

People with Bibles can learn how to use them.



2. OBSERVE, INTERPET, APPLY: THE PRINCIPLES



THE PRINCIPLES OF OBSERVATION

The first step in studying the Bible is to observe what it says. Before you've even crossed the line of scrimmage, however, familiarity is right there to knock you down. When you think you know something, you stop paying attention to it.

For example, how many stairs are there in your house? What color are your father's eyes? What is your license plate number? Name three left-handed people in your acquaintance. As Sherlock Holmes says to Dr. Watson in "A Scandal in Bohemia," "You see, but you do not observe."

You sit down with your Bible, and you're ready to study it. You pray and open the page to the right spot. Then...what? You see lots of ink and paper. You've heard these verses before. You'd like to go deeper, and you don't want to let familiarity get in the way. But what exactly can you do? What should you begin to observe?

Words – Books of the Bible were constructed from stories. These stories were built from episodes. Episodes arose by gatherings of paragraphs. Paragraphs disemboweled produce sentences. Sentences dissect into words. Words are our building blocks. Let's observe them to start.

Grammar – Without grammar, it would be difficult to communicate. The heart of grammar lies in subjects and verbs. Note them well: "God created." "God so loved." "All things work together."

Structure – Like music, literature has structure. ABA. ABCABC. Once we see the structure, we can identify the sections to interpret and apply them.

Genre – Genre has to do with style: narrative, poetry, prophecy, law, etc. Genre is easy to miss because it's not something that is likely to change substantially from verse to verse. However, once you observe a book's genre, you'll understand how to read the passage you are studying. And you're likely to come across only minor deviations from time to time.

Mood – Mood is the emotional direction in which an author tries to move his audience. Can you see the difference in the following sentences? "I'm not upset with you. I'm **not** upset with you. I'm not upset with *you*. I'M NOT UPSET WITH YOU!!!" Observing a passage's mood enables you to experience the story more fully. The author of a Bible passage is able to communicate not just the details, but how the participants experienced those details. In doing so, he desires the audience to experience this story similarly.



Here are four specific tips to help you get started:

Repeated Words

I can't repeat it enough: Pay attention to anything that repeats. This is one of the simplest observations you can make. Get a Bible you don't mind writing in, and highlight repeated words with the same color. The author's big ideas will jump off the page. For example, Genesis 14 repeats the word "king" more than 20 times. It's even built into one of the character's names (Melchizedek means "king of righteousness"). The author wants us to think about what a true king looks like.

Comparison and Contrast

A passage often shows how two or more things are similar (comparison) or different (contrast). Picking up on that connection can help. For example, Mark 5:21-43 leads us to compare and contrast the dying girl and the bleeding woman. How do those comparisons and contrasts help Jairus? How should they help us? Characters. Pay special attention to how each character is named in a passage. Authors will communicate important information just by using certain names. For example, Genesis 21, which has a lot to say about Ishmael, never mentions his name. He's always "the son of Hagar" or "the son of the slave woman." Why do you think that is?

Connectors

Words like "therefore," "in those days," or "in the same way" draw connections between sentences, paragraphs, or chapters. Notice the connections so you can work to figure out why they're there. For example, Genesis 15:1 begins with "after these things." How might it affect your understanding of this chapter if you think about how Abram might be feeling immediately after the events of chapter 14?

Careful observation creates the foundation for accurate interpretation and useful application. Don't move on too quickly from this important step.



THE PRINCIPLES OF INTERPRETATION

The second major step in studying the Bible is to interpret, or figure out why a passage says what it says.

There are a few obstacles to excellent interpretation:

Persistent observation: staying in the “what” and never moving to the “why.”

Careless observation: building our conclusions on a shaky foundation.

Unexamined presumption: drawing conclusions from limited evidence without investigation.

Biblical authors intend to communicate meaning. We can agree or disagree with the meaning, but we can't overlook the fact that it's there. In other words, if someone claims a text means whatever you like, a helpful and respectful response might be, “Do you really mean that?”

By using the common standards of human language, it's possible to rightly understand the Bible. God's word is a knowable word.

Context

Because every Bible passage was written in and for a particular situation, we must not lose sight of three kinds of context: historical, literary, and inter-textual.

Historical context involves the circumstances of writing.

Literary context involves the passages before and after the text under consideration, as well as the argument of the entire book.

Inter-textual context involves other Scripture passages that quote and/or explain the passage under consideration.

If we lift individual verses from their context, we endanger interpretation. At best, we might still hit on biblical truth; we just look foolish to the watching world when they see that a passage doesn't mean what we think. At worst, we run into error, heresy, or unbelief, or we lead others toward those dangers.



How does interpretation work?

1. Ask questions of your observations. Lots of questions. Be as inquisitive as possible. Your questions should be about your observations of the text. The main questions to ask are What? Why? and So what?
 - What? questions define the terms. Who, when, and where questions often fit in this category as well.
 - Why? questions uncover the author's purpose.
 - So what? questions draw out the implications.
2. Answer the questions from the text. Once you've asked your questions, answer them. One critical rule: Answer questions only if they are answered—explicitly addressed or implicitly assumed—in the text (Proverbs 30:5-6).
 - Some answers are assumed in the text. The original audience would have known these answers, but they're lost on us because of the thousands of years that separate our lives from theirs.
 - Some answers are addressed in the text. The author made these explicit for his audience.
3. Determine the author's main point. Your goal is to understand the main thing the author is communicating through the passage. We may draw conclusions about secondary, questionable, or implied points, but the main points are the ones worth fighting for. To figure out the author's main point:
 - Track the author's flow of thought. How did he get from the first verse to the last verse? One way to do this is to break the chapter into paragraphs. Then determine the main point for each paragraph. String them together to see what might be the main point of the whole chapter. If you're still not sure, you could break it down further into sentences before putting it back together.
 - Outline the essential grammar. This requires careful observation of the passage. You can distill narratives to their basic plot structure. You can outline instructional texts by writing out just the subjects and verbs of each sentence.
 - Often, noticing the shape of this skeleton helps with identifying the main point.
 - Consider what the passage says about Jesus. We know he's the main point of the Bible (John 5:39), so we should expect each section to say something about him.



A note about main points

A main point is not the same thing as a summary. A summary may be the climax of observation, but it is not the same as interpretation. A summary captures what was said, but not why it was said. A summary restates a passage; a main point explains the passage. Most Bibles have section headings which are summaries, not main points.

The good news is that, once you have a summary of the passage, it's not complicated to get to the main point. Just take your summary and ask, "Why?"

For example, a summary of Genesis 1 could be, "The creation of the world." But a main point would explain why the narrator tells of the creation of the world: "God's creative activity sets a pattern for human existence."

How to see Jesus on every page of the Bible

Jesus is the main point of the entire Bible. He said so himself (John 5:39, Luke 24:44-48). Philip saw it (John 1:45). Peter recognized it (1 Pet 1:10-12). Paul knew it (2 Cor 1:20).

According to Luke 24:46-47, every passage of Scripture reveals Jesus by explaining at least one of the following truths:

The Messiah would suffer and rise from the dead.

We must repent of our sin and be forgiven.

This message (that the Messiah's death and resurrection make forgiveness possible) must be preached to all nations.

We must first understand the main point of an Old Testament passage before we can connect it to Jesus. We shouldn't look for Jesus in every detail. Jesus isn't necessarily in every detail. But his message is there. When you read the Bible (especially the Old Testament), always ask which of the three points from Luke 24 is being addressed.



Avoid mistakes with commentaries

Commentaries and study Bibles are like guns: Powerful and effective, but gravely dangerous when misused. We're surrounded by great resources, but every blessing can become a curse when we rely on the blessing and not on the Lord. So watch out for common mistakes regarding commentary usage.

1. **Mistake #1:** Ignore what others have said. We need to learn from the wisdom of others, and study Bibles and commentaries (at least good ones) represent the best Christian thinking over thousands of years.
2. **Mistake #2:** Allow commentaries to do our Bible study for us. It's tempting to read a portion of Scripture and go right to the study notes or commentary. Once we've seen what the experts have said, we think we've understood the passage. This practice is not much different from what the Jewish rabbis used to do. They'd debate interpretation by quoting different schools of thought, referring to the relevant commentaries to support their position. When Jesus came along, he astonished his generation because he refused to teach this way (Matt 7:28-29). He went right to the Scripture, and he observed, interpreted, and applied it (Matt 21:16, 42; Mark 2:25). Jesus passed his authority on to his followers, so they could interpret his word for succeeding generations (Matt 28:18, 20; John 14:12, 25-26; 2 Cor 5:20). With the help of Jesus' spirit, you, too, can read and understand God's knowable word.
3. **Mistake #3:** Go to commentaries too quickly. When the meaning of a passage isn't intuitively obvious, it's tempting to grab a commentary right away. But try observing the Scripture and working to interpret it on your own. Spend time thinking about it. Learn how to ask questions and then answer them. Try to determine the author's main point. Then read some study notes or commentaries to "check your work." See if others have already come to similar conclusions from the text. If they have, terrific. If they haven't, you may want to reconsider your own conclusions. Either way, you'll get the help you need without short-circuiting the process of learning how to handle the Scripture yourself (2 Tim 2:15).
4. **Mistake #4:** Believe everything you read. Just because something has been published doesn't mean it's true. The point of the OIA method of Bible study is to teach you how to think and how to draw near to the Lord. As you compare your study of Scripture to that of the experts, be humble but also be wise. Always ask if what you're reading in the commentary is faithful to the text or not.



THE PRINCIPLES OF APPLICATION

The third major step in studying the Bible is to apply, or figure out how you should change. To transition well from interpretation to application:

1. **Work from the main point.** It's important to understand the main point of a passage before applying it. Working from the main point gives your application teeth, since it focuses on what God considers most important.
2. **Ask good “So what?” questions.** During the interpretation stage, you asked lots of questions. The main types are What? Why? and So What? That third type of question can be difficult, but it provides the bridge between interpretation and application.

The chief obstacle to vigorous application is our inertia. Left to ourselves, we will either stay put or keep moving in the same direction. But the Scriptures apply both force and direction to move or redirect us toward the Lord Jesus.

Two directions and three spheres

You can apply a Bible passage in two directions: inward and outward. In other words, you can change your own life to be more like Christ (inward), and you can become an influencer who helps others learn how to change to be more like Christ (outward).

You can apply a Bible passage to three spheres: head, heart, and hands. In other words, a passage can address any or all three areas of conviction, character, and competence.

The Head represents everything you think and believe. This sphere involves thinking God's thoughts after him and believing his truth. It involves identifying lies you believe so you can replace them with the truth. Knowing God through his word will change your thinking.

To apply the Bible to your thinking:

1. **Identify what you think.**
2. **Identify what God wants you to think instead.**
3. **Begin thinking the new thoughts.**



The Heart represents who you are. This sphere involves becoming a new person who desires the Lord above all and shows godly wisdom and selfless character. It's possible to apply the Bible vigorously to your head and hands and still not end up in the right place. Our culture abounds with (ungodly) theologians and legalists who have not been changed from the inside out.

A key question is, "What kind of person does God want me to be?" You can tackle this question in a few different ways:

1. What do you desire or value, and what should you desire or value instead?
2. What ungodly character traits should you turn from, and what Christ-like character traits can you imitate instead?
3. How might you be relying on your performance, and how can you rely more on Christ's performance?
4. What are your greatest hopes? Is your bucket list too small compared to the Lord's bucket list for you?
5. Are you the kind of person others should imitate? Why or why not, and what will you do about it?

The Hands represent everything you do. This sphere involves imitating the Lord and his ambassadors, learning new skills so you can be more effective at building God's Kingdom, and laying aside your old patterns of selfish behavior.

Your application of the Bible must hit your hands. It will equip you in skills you didn't think you could acquire. The Bible will instruct you and train you in fresh ways, so you can become a skilled laborer for the kingdom of God.



The application matrix

The two directions and the three spheres combine to make six potential ways to apply a passage.

	Inward	Outward
Head		
Heart		
Hands		

You don't have to fill all 6 boxes in every Bible study, but you may want to hit all 6 boxes over time. As you think about applying the Bible to all aspects of life:

Don't fall into the trap of hypocritical living. Push your application inward, and don't ever ask others to do something you're not willing to do yourself.

Don't fall into the trap of self-centered living. Push your application outward, and consider how you can be more effective at influencing others to know Christ.

Don't fall into the trap of overly theological application (too much focus on your head). God cares about what you think and believe, but he also cares about your character and obedience.

Don't fall into the trap of overly pietistic application (too much focus on your heart). God cares about who you are, but it should flow out to your thinking and obedience as well.

Don't fall into the trap of overly ethical application (too much focus on your hands). God cares about what you do, but he also cares about your thinking and character.



Instead:

1. Remember Jesus. Your application must connect to and derive from Jesus and his saving work. In other words, nothing gets up your gumption for serving the Lord more than grace, grace, and more grace. You can't drum up more faithfulness from the inside. You must be broken by God's unbelievably high standard, and you must rest in Jesus' death in your place and obedience on your behalf. Every day. Then, you'll walk the straight and narrow.
2. Get specific. Your application must also be specific. What does it mean to apply the Bible specifically?
 - Point your finger at yourself before you point it at anybody else. You're not qualified to help others grow in Christ unless you are growing in Christ yourself.
 - Focus on your heart in addition to your behavior. Don't apply the Bible shallowly. Figure out what you desire or believe, and work to change those desires and beliefs.
 - Know your next steps. Don't be satisfied with your application until you've identified specific steps you can take to address the issue.
 - Make progress measurable. How will you know if you did the application or not? "Pray more" is not measurable. Next week, can I ask you if you prayed more? Prayed more than what? How? When?
 - Put off and put on. Think of application as a process of stopping certain things and starting other things. Put off the old self and put on the new self. Don't focus on stopping sin without replacing it with godliness.
 - Don't be lame. It's easy for application to become mechanical or to miss the point. Ask others who know you, "How do you think I need to grow?" Target those areas. Don't miss the point of what God wants to do in your life by focusing on irrelevant minutiae.



3. THE UNITY OF THE BIBLE & CONCLUSION



THE UNITY OF THE BIBLE

The Bible consists of 66 different books, written by dozens of people across millennia. The Bible is one book, written by one author (God the Holy Spirit), conceived in eternity and executed in history.

Both statements are true. In the Bible, unity and diversity co-exist, just like in the Trinity and in the Church. So we must be fair to both.

When we talk about OIA Bible study (Observation, Interpretation, Application), we focus primarily on the diversity of Scripture. Each author of each passage has a unique point to make. We read each text in its context to figure out its main point, connect it to Jesus, and draw applications for today. We'll get something different out of each passage. Different cultures and different generations will draw different applications from the same main points. That's okay; in fact it's beautiful when we see God's knowable word connecting with any person in any culture at any time.

However, we must not neglect the unity of the Scripture. God the Holy Spirit spoke through each of those different authors. He strategically unravelled the stories and the laws and the poems and the letters in just the right way to reveal the Lord Jesus to the world.

Correlation

After studying a passage of Scripture, we should connect what we learned to the rest of Scripture. This is the process of Correlation—constructing a systematic theology or worldview from the Scripture.

Correlation is not the same thing as cross-referencing. Cross-referencing is what we do when we surf the Bible as though it were YouTube. We read one passage, which makes us think of another one, which makes us think of another one, which makes us think of another one, which makes us think of another one, world without end, amen.

Unfortunately, cross-referencing rarely produces much insight into any of the texts. It certainly takes a lot of time, which produces some satisfaction. But it doesn't help people to know God. It's like speed-dating, giving the impression of activity without much intimacy.



How do you correlate effectively while avoiding the dangers of unhelpful cross-referencing?

1. Don't correlate too soon; understand each passage first. When you feel stuck in your Bible study, don't jump to the center column of your Bible and start flipping, or you'll be in danger of making an unhelpful connection. When you feel stuck, the answer is usually to go back and observe more. Or to think of a few more questions. But by all means, take a guess at the main point before you attempt any connections to other passages.
2. Don't just harmonize; rather illuminate. In former generations, Bible teachers commonly sought to harmonize parallel passages. A teacher would take a story, such as the feeding of the 5,000 in Matthew 14, Mark 6, Luke 9, and John 6, and he'd "re-write" the story using details from all four accounts. Then he'd preach or comment on the harmonized text, and not on any one of the original texts. If you like old commentaries, you know what I mean. For example, John Calvin didn't write any commentaries on Matthew, Mark, or Luke. He wrote just one commentary on the Harmony of the Evangelists and another one on John. Unfortunately, this approach misses the fact that Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John all had different points to make, even when recounting the same event.

Here's what's good, though: Sometimes other passages can help to illuminate the passage under study. For example, Genesis 15:7-21 doesn't make a lot of sense to modern readers without help from Jeremiah 34:18-20. Ancient readers were familiar with the ritual; we are not.

3. Don't connect words; connect ideas. The advent of internet search engines made it easier than ever to look up every instance of a word or phrase and string them together. The problem is that a word's meaning isn't in the word itself but in its use in the sentence. For example, what does the word "mean" mean? Does it have to do with defining something? Or is it a person with a bad temper? Or is it the average of a set of numbers? Or a lack of some sort? Or is it hip slang for "great," as in "she cooks a mean casserole"? We can know the answer only when we see the word in context.

As you correlate, correlate well. You'll grow closer to the Lord himself, day after day after day, world without end, amen.



CONCLUSION: YOU ARE APPROVED!

Sometimes people don't study the Bible because they feel unqualified. But we're here to tell you that you're ready. You've graduated. You've been accepted for the position.

Consider Paul's exhortation to Timothy: "Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth (2 Timothy 2:15).

Observe Paul's command: "present yourself to God as one approved." The main verb is "present," not "approve." We make all kinds of mistakes when we get this wrong.

1. Mistake #1: Present yourself to God to get his approval. Sometimes we think we need to be qualified before we can approach the Lord (even through Bible study). Paul says you've already been approved, so present yourself accordingly.
2. Mistake #2: Fail to present yourself, fearing God's disapproval. This mistake is the ugly stepchild of the first one. Sinners who think they need God's approval eventually stop trying to get it. They keep failing, so they give up.
3. Mistake #3: Present yourself to men as one approved. This is the classic mistake of religious people. We think that if others respect and appreciate us, we must have arrived. Either we seek people's approval, or we act superior as those already approved. In either case, we focus on the wrong thing—ourselves.
4. Mistake #4: Present others to God as one approved. We make this mistake when we find our worth in the success of those we lead. The Judaizers in Galatia were guilty of this error (Gal 6:13), and their error has not yet died out.

The Challenge: Present yourself to God as one approved. You don't need to get approved. You are already approved.

Jesus died and rose for you to qualify you for a position close to God. Now, do your best to remember that fact. As you remember it, you'll be ready handle the word of truth rightly because you'll see this message of grace on every page.

Miss the message of grace, and you'll no longer handle the word rightly. But if you trust in Christ you're still approved, so you can keep trying to get it right.

This booklet contains a mere sketch of the main principles of OIA Bible study, and it serves primarily as a reference. To learn the method well, we need lots of examples and practice.

For such expansion and practice exercises, see the book **Knowable Word: Helping Ordinary People Learn to Study the Bible** at bit.ly/Knowable. For additional resources, visit www.knowableword.com/resources.

“I look forward to using this book to improve my own Bible study.”
– **Jerry Bridges, author of *The Pursuit of Holiness***

“Krol brings clarity and ease of communication to understanding the Bible. This book possesses the rare quality of being simple without being shallow. It is at once accessible and yet profound and challenging. It is hard to over-estimate the value of this tidy volume.”
– **Dr. Tedd Tripp, pastor and author of *Shepherding a Child’s Heart***

“Here is an excellent practical guide to interpreting the Bible. Krol has thought through, tested, and illustrated in a clear, accessible way basic steps in interpreting the Bible, and made everything available in a way that will encourage ordinary people to deepen their own study.”
– **Vern Poythress, professor of New Testament interpretation at Westminster Theological Seminary and author of *God-Centered Biblical Interpretation***

