

INDUCTIVE STUDY

CHEAT SHEET

In many ways a student of the Bible acts as an investigator, steadily following clues within the text. This method of investigating Scripture is often called “inductive Bible study” or “exegesis.” The goal of a Bible study is *not to speak for the text, but to let the text speak for itself*. This cheat sheet provides believers with a helpful guide for studying and understanding the Bible. The basic techniques taught below are the same as those taught to pastors and scholars. Since this sheet has been designed as a reference source, don’t be afraid to customize the directions below to fit your personal learning style and time availability. Enjoy!

I. PREPARATION: Finding a Passage.

If you don’t already have a passage to study, here are a few tips to get you started. Also, a proper inductive Study will take anywhere from 45 minutes to 1.5 hours to complete. (If you have a passage to study then skip this step)

- ✓ **Locate a passage to study.** The best way to locate a passage or verse to study is to look up a topic of interest in a subject index (verses listed by topics) or concordance (verses listed by words) and write down the passages that seem to be the most relevant and interesting to you. Next, *narrow down your list to the verse you would most like to study*. The best way to do this is to actually look up the verses and see what they say.
- ✓ **Keep a list of potential passages to study.** Ideally you want to study the Bible on a regular basis, about once a week on average. Therefore, it is also a good idea to keep a handy list of passages to study. This way you always have a pool of verses you can draw from. These might come from a sermon, book, article, song, devotional reading, etc. **Note:** *This is different from a devotional reading of Scripture, such as a daily reading plan or book, and places a high emphasis on application and meditation. Exegesis places a high priority on the study and correct interpretation of Scripture before its application.*
- ✓ **Determine boundaries of your study.** After you have found a key verse or passage to study, it is important that you mark off the boundaries of your study. This means finding *natural* section breaks before and after your passage. The authors of the Bible were very intentional in their writing, both in their words and organization. If you have correctly determined the start and end of the passage you are going to study you should have a nice “nugget” (or “pericope”) that has a beginning, middle and end. Somewhere between five and twenty-five verses is a good rule of thumb; but remember, let the text provide its own *natural boundaries*.

II. OBSERVATION: Reading your passage.

After finding a passage to study, you can start your study. This means reading your passage carefully and repeatedly. Don’t already assume you know what your passage is saying. Instead, immerse yourself into the text, allow yourself to be teachable and don’t underestimate the depth of your passage. Here are a series of steps to help your study:

- ✓ **Pray & Journal.** It is highly recommended that you take a few minutes to bathe your study in prayer and keep a journal of your studies. You can list the date and passage on the top of the page and write your notes below as you go. Keep a record of your thoughts and observations. At the conclusion of your study, summarize what you have learned and close with a prayer.
- ✓ **Read through the entire passage once.** First, try and simply follow the words and story of the author. Go slow. Take your time. Make sure you understand the passage well enough *to restate the author’s main point in a single sentence*. In fact, write down the author’s main point on your study paper. Don’t be afraid to be wrong, you can always change your mind later.
- ✓ **Read the passage again.** Yes, again. The Bible is not a cheap novel on the grocery store aisle; it will take time and effort to fully grasp its meaning. Remember, the original audience of the Bible thought very differently then you might expect. Get comfortable, and work through your passage but this time mark it up. *Take notes and highlight/mark important elements in the text.*
- ✓ **Circle any key words and phrases.** Read the passage again (how many times is that now?) and *look for keywords/phrases* you don’t understand or think you should look up in a word study, commentary or Bible dictionary. Trust your intuition. If something stands out, flag it in your notes so that you can return to it later. This step is important so don’t skip it!
- ✓ **Identify signposts (especially transitions, verbs and descriptors).** If you are studying a narrative, *mark any signposts in the text* - like beginning and ending of events, descriptors, change in action, the shock of surprise or the appearance of irony. Basically, you want to pay attention to anything that catches your eye or seems out of place. Not only does this help you outline you passage, these details can sometimes lead you to a deeper meaning embedded within the text.
- ✓ **Organize your passage into key parts.** Try and divide your passage into sections. If your text is a narrative (i.e. a parable or story), look for defining moments such as the arrival of characters, direct quotes or changes in tone or location. If it is a letter or speech,



look for changes in flow, arguments, topics or tone. Once again, you are looking for *natural* divisions within the text. *Outline each section and provide a short description.*

- ✓ **Try and write the answers to each of the following questions.** You can answer these questions individually, or you can write your own summary of the passage. This will help make sure you covered the basics.
 - What is the topic of this passage? • Who is its author? • Who is he or she writing to? • What are the author's key points?
 - What are the key words of this passage? • How would you describe the tone and/or style of the passage?
- ✓ **Write down questions you have.** Before you move onto the next step, stop and think of any questions that you have after reading your passage. Could you answer all the questions above? Does anything seem strange or unexpected to you? Do the characters' actions surprise you? Are some words unclear?

III. CONTEXT: *Studying your passage.*

Now it is the time to use outside resources to aid you in your study. What resources you use will be largely determined by what resources are available to you, but try to direct your research to things you noticed previously while reading your passage. Here are some suggestions:

- ✓ **Read the sections that come before and after the verse you are studying.** Start by reading any study notes you Bible may have on this topic. Then, try and understand how your passage fits within this larger context. What is it that your section is contributing? What is its purpose? Sometimes the answers to these questions are obvious but sometimes they're not. Try and understand why the author placed this saying/passage/story where he did.
- ✓ **Look up the key words or concepts you highlighted in a word study or Bible dictionary/encyclopedia.** In the previous step you looked for key words or phrases in your passage, some of these might be familiar to you while others may not, but try and find out more about each of these topics. Try and prioritize your key terms. Study the most important and unfamiliar terms first.
- ✓ **Look up the answers to the questions in the previous section.** Hopefully you wrote down some questions as you read through the passage in the previous steps. Use this time to look up the answers to your questions. Oftentimes a commentary or Bible handbook is a good place to start. If all else fails, you can use www.google.com (but beware of questionable sources).
- ✓ **Open up a commentary or other resource and see what other scholars think about your passage.** By now you should have developed your own opinions (not conclusions) about what the passage is teaching. Now it is time to research what others (commentators, pastors, authors, etc.) have to say about the passage. Did they see something you missed? What are the opinions of your resource? Don't simply agree with their conclusions, but if you do disagree, make sure you know why. If you need resources, CCV has a list of online resources on our website www.ccvnow.com. Click "media > resources" or just type in the address <http://www.ccvnow.com/media/resources.asp> into your web browser.
- ✓ **CORRELATION: Studying related passages.** You want to do your best to "check" your interpretation against other passages of Scripture you are familiar with. In many studies it is necessary to look up other passages of Scripture if they are directly related to your text. If the author of your passage intentionally quotes, references or alludes to other passages of Scripture, then look it up. Also, if you are doing a topical study (i.e. studies on large topics such as prayer, God, sin, forgiveness, etc.) it is likely your passage only teaches one or two aspects of that topic. If you want to know what the Bible, as a whole, teaches on your topic then you will have to study more than one passage.

VI. APPLICATION: *Drawing out meaning.*

*Now it is time to apply what your passage teaches in a way that can change your life.
The best way to do this is to ask yourself questions like:*

- ✓ What things did this study teach me that I did not understand before?
- ✓ How does this passage challenge my understanding of God? How does it challenge my understanding of myself?
- ✓ How does this passage challenge the way I see and interact with the world around me?
- ✓ What truths or principles does this passage teach and how can I make them central in my life?
- ✓ Do comparable situations like this still exist today and, if I ever find myself in one, how should I respond?
- ✓ How have I been challenged to change through studying this passage?
- ✓ Does this passage speak to anything currently going on in my life or in the lives of my friends and family?

