

# How to Study the Bible

## Lesson 2 – The Precepts Overview / Book Summary Method

*He (Jesus) is the one we proclaim, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone fully mature in Christ.  
Colossians 1:28*

AW Tozer on the great saints/people of faith –

*“I venture to suggest that the one vital quality which they had in common was spiritual receptivity...something which urged them Godward...they had spiritual awareness and they went on to cultivate it until it became the biggest thing in their lives. They differed from the average person in that when they felt the inward longing they DID SOMETHING ABOUT IT. They acquired the lifelong habit of spiritual response....Our part: Surrender to the Spirit of God. If we cooperate with Him in loving obedience, God will manifest Himself to us, and that manifestation will be the difference between a nominal Christian life and a life radiant with the light of His face.”*

This Bible Study is teaching us to do something about our inward longing for God. It is giving us tools to get to know our God better. Today we will be learning the...

### **The Precepts Overview Method**

Precepts Ministries want to motivate each believer to study the Bible for herself, inductively, using the Bible as her primary source and other works as secondary. That is why we have requested that for this study you DO NOT consult commentaries or read the study helps in your Bible at this time. I am not saying to totally ignore commentaries (which are the lifelong studies of dedicated and godly men and women) but to just consult them AFTER we study the text for ourselves. Please allow the Holy Spirit to be your first teacher. Commentaries are written by imperfect human beings and you will find that they sometimes don't agree with one another. God's Word is perfect. True, it is easier to sit down and read what someone else has written about God's Word but you end up with secondhand knowledge. Let's do the study for ourselves.

Our goal is to become more like Christ. It is possible to know the Word of God and not know the God of the Word. All of this study is valueless if we don't change and become more like Jesus in our attitudes, our thoughts, our speech, our actions and our values.

***You will find that the real problem for most of us is not with interpreting difficult passages but with obeying the passages we do understand.***

Learning the inductive Bible study method is only the beginning. You need to “go deeper with others by studying the whole counsel of God and then in obedience to your Lord, disciple others, call them on His behalf to deny themselves, take up their cross, and follow Jesus as a way of life.”

This is why we had Jo Stone come and speak to us about personal evangelism at our first meeting. We are not doing this study so that you can fill yourself up with a “knowledge that puffs up”. We are doing this study because the Bible tells us everything we need to know about life. We are doing this study so that you can learn to feed yourself from the Word of God, discovering what it says and applying it in your life and then going out to tell others of the hope that is in you, Jesus. We want you to love the Word and pass it on! Remember, Jo said we just need to stay one step ahead of those we are discipling. To do that, you need to be in the Word, studying it DAILY.

**The First Step in Bible Study - Pray** – If you are a believer in Jesus Christ, and have accepted Jesus as your personal Lord and Savior, you have a teacher. His name is the Holy Spirit and he lives inside of you. Talk to Him. Ask Him to help you understand what you are about to read and study. Pray. Ask for God’s protection as you study His Word. We have an enemy. His name is Satan. He does not want you to know or understand God’s truth. He will tell you that Bible Study is just too hard for you, that you’ll never get this and that it’s useless to try. He’ll put obstacles to keep you from getting here or from having a quiet time to study. Don’t listen to his lies. Instead...

“ask God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives, so that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, (Colossians 1:9-10)

**CONTEXT** - We are beginning with an Overview, a Book Summary Method. We do this because we want to establish the context of what we are studying. This will be the “birds-eye view” of the book of Colossians. Later we can do a Chapter Summary and Analysis (to discover the details) and a Book Synthesis (to put it all together.)

The rule of context is that **CONTEXT RULES**. What is context exactly? Context means “that which goes with the text.” We always check for context because we do not want to pluck scripture out of its context and make it say something that it doesn’t mean. We can find the context by looking for what is repeated in the text.

Remember our three steps of Inductive Bible Study are:

**Observation** – What does the text say?

**Interpretation** – What does the text mean?

(This is NOT what it means to you. It is what the original author meant it to say. There is only one meaning but many different ways of applying truth in your life.)

**Application** – How does the meaning apply to me?

(Application is not necessarily the third step. It takes place as truth confronts you. When you learn God’s truth, you are accountable for it. You must act immediately on what you have learned.)

Today we will be focusing on Observation. In Observation we can establish the context. Context always rules Interpretation. We want to deal with the text objectively. Objectively means: *dealing with facts or conditions as perceived without distortion by personal feelings, prejudices, or interpretations.* Subjectively means: *modified or affected by one's personal views, experience, or background.*

How we feel about the text and relate to the text is important, yes. But we want to deal with it objectively, first. Much of the Christian life is about finding this kind of balance. Yes, you always want to read God's Word devotionally, looking to hear what God is saying to you, but in Bible Study we also want to look at the text objectively to discover the context. **Let the text speak for itself.**

## Observation – What does the text say?

### Step One (after prayer!) –

Get a good translation. Remember the chart I showed and handed out at our first meeting. For Bible Study you want a translation of the Bible (NASB, NIV, etc.) NOT a paraphrase of the Bible (The Message, Living Bible, etc.) It might shock you to know that the King James Version is not the best translation. In "How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth" by Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, they go as far to say "The KJV (is) no longer a living language... This is why for study you should use almost any modern translation rather than the KJV or the NKJV."

I have found that the Inductive Study Bible is very helpful. It is an NASB and has all the tools in it to help you do the Inductive Method on your own. **Show copy.**

Fee and Stuart also are very thorough in showing you that the Bible contains different kinds of literature. Each chapter of their book teaches you how to read the different kinds of literature in the Bible. Which leads us to...

### Step Two –

Identify the type of literature. There are many types of literature in the Bible: Historical, biographical, poetic, proverbial, prophetic, epistles, combinations. We study the different kinds of literature in different ways. Colossians is a letter written to a church. We handle it differently than a historical book like Genesis or a book of poetry like Psalms.

### Step Three –

Read through the whole book. Many people spend all their time reading about the Bible rather than reading Scripture itself. Read and re-read. Every good Bible teacher –

including our own Pastor Andy - says the key to learning the Word of God is REPETITION. So just read it. Read it in different translations. Read it in a paraphrase. Read a clean copy so you don't concentrate on your previous notes. Read without stopping. Read it aloud if you have to. Get a CD with someone reading it aloud and listen to it in your car or while you do your housework.

After the first or second reading - Read with pen in hand. Jot down in your spiritual journal your thoughts and first impressions, questions you may have, verses that pop out. Look for truth. We want to know the truth.

Slow down and really look at what the scripture says. Don't skim. People always ask me where I get the stuff I speak on. It's almost always right there before our very eyes and we just don't "see" it. Bible reading and Bible Study are not the same thing. A quiet time and Bible Study are not the same thing. Bible reading and quiet time are a necessary first step but then we need to take the next step. We are now about to enter the realm of Bible **Study**...

#### **Step Four –**

Ask the right questions. Read with purpose. Interrogate the text. Interview it. Be systematic. Now as you read through the third or fourth time, begin marking the text. I have placed a marking sample in your notebooks. You can use this as a guideline or develop your own marking system.

We will be learning what to look for in the text and how to mark it in a few moments. But here's where the challenging part of this Method comes in. You might think this method is perhaps a little fastidious or overly meticulous, or too academic for you - but if you stick with it and will follow through with your marking, you will see how it reveals what the text is saying to you.

This is your study, enjoy it. Don't stress out! Don't let all the colors and marking distract you from the text. The text is the important thing. It is not important that you do your marking "perfectly". Do what works for you, just be consistent.

**We'll be looking for the 5 W's and the H:  
The Who, What, Where, When, Why and How  
of the scripture we are reading.**

(Caution: You may not find all of these in every passage)

**Many times scripture is misinterpreted simply because  
the 5W's and the H are not carefully observed.**

First let's - Observe the obvious: We'll be looking for People and Events. Look for names of the author, the recipients and other people. We can mark the pronouns (I, me, my, us, we, etc.) for these folks as well. (marking EVERY pronoun is a matter of personal preference.) I find marking the "you" helps me feel like the letter is addressed to me, too.

Ask the text: Who is the author? Who are the recipients? What does he tell you about himself? What are his circumstances? What is happening? Where is he? Why is he there? When is this letter written? Why did he write the letter? What was his purpose? How does this scripture change my life? What can I apply from this scripture? What are some new things I learned?

When we start looking for the answers to these questions we will discover the writer's purpose and theme. We'll also begin to see the structure and content of the book of Colossians.

We are trying to find the writer's purpose, to outline the book. As you read and re-read the text you'll begin to notice that there are certain key words, subjects or ideas repeated. Look for these repetitions and start marking them. Maybe you can see what appears to be the key verse. Mark it. Do you see a theme developing? Jot down your ideas on the book's theme or summary statement.

### **Step Five -**

Write down your observations. This is the difference between Bible reading and Bible study. "Thoughts disentangle themselves when they pass through the lips and the fingertips." If you haven't put your observations down on paper you haven't really thought them out. Talk about them with a friend. This also helps organize your thoughts and shows what you have learned if you can repeat it to a friend.

Precepts Overview Studies include worksheets like the ones in your binder where we can summarize what we have learned about:

- People in Colossians
- Key Words, Warnings, Instructions
- The Lord Jesus Christ as Portrayed in Colossians
- At A Glance Chart – to summarize overall theme, chapter themes, note the author and his purpose for writing, key words and verse.

### **Step Six -**

Obedience. I've said that application begins immediately (even though we are in the Observation phase (Overview) of our study.) Each time you study, take a moment to apply what you have learned that day in your life. We are striving to know Christ and to become like Him.

For success in Bible Study: Prepare. Be systematic. Start to collect and become familiar with the right tools: A good study Bible, several translations, colored pens or pencils for marking the text, concordance (perhaps the most important tool you can own – there are now online concordances like Biblegateway.com), Bible Dictionary, Topical Bible, Bible Handbook, Word Studies.

Helpful Reading: Kay Arthurs' New How to Study Your Bible (book and workbook) and Rick Warren's Bible Study Methods.

## **PRACTICE:**

Now let's open our notebooks and practice the Precepts Overview Method.

Your notebook should include:

- A color copy of a system for marking key words
- Colossians Observation Worksheets (which we will pull out and begin marking in a few moments)
- A "People in Colossians" Worksheet
- A "Key Words, Warnings, Instructions" Worksheet
- An "At A Glance Chart"
- A "The Lord Jesus Christ as Portrayed in Colossians" Worksheet
- A photocopy outlining the Precepts Inductive Bible Study Method
- We've also included a couple worksheets of Rick Warren's method for book survey. Different teachers have different ways of doing an overview.

We've talked about it, now let's do some Inductive Bible Study in the Book of Colossians.

Arrange Handouts, PRAY, and then... Grab your pens or pencils (we have supplied some at your tables) and **let's begin marking Colossians.**

1. Mark all references to the Author.
2. Mark all references to the recipients. List all these on your "People in Colossians" worksheet. Use words from the text.
3. Mark all references to Christ and God. Jesus/Christ is a key word for the book of Colossians. Fill in your worksheet "The Lord Jesus Christ as Portrayed in Colossians". Use words from the text.
4. Mark any Warnings, Commands or Instructions.
5. Mark any other Key Words you may notice.
6. Summarize 4 & 5 (above) on the "Key Words, Warning, Instructions" Worksheet. Use words from the text.
7. Fill in the At A Glance chart with what you have learned. Use words from the text.

## Homework:

1. Read and re-read the book of Colossians. Read it in different translations or a paraphrase if you have it.
2. Finish the marking we began in class in the rest of the book of Colossians (author, recipients, Jesus, all, commands, warnings, instructions)
3. Other key words to look for: Prayer, Gospel, Wisdom, Knowledge, Faith, Mystery, Self, Love
4. Finish filling in the 3 worksheets we started in class.
5. Fill in the "At A Glance" chart
6. Be thorough. These exercises will prepare you for the Methods to come.