

Inductive Bible Studies

by Dr. David T. Fry

Spiritual Maturation

In his *Real-Life Discipleship Training Manual*, Jim Putman describes four stages of spiritual maturity: infancy, childhood, young adulthood, and parenthood. I have found the metaphor of eating habits useful in explaining what these stages mean for spiritual maturity.

Spiritual infants are completely dependent on someone else to feed them. They may fuss and complain when they are hungry, but they will never feed themselves. Spiritual infants can only consume the “milk” of the word (1 Cor. 3:2). Spiritual children are capable of feeding themselves, but they do not have a disciplined diet. They would rather “snack” than eat meat. They need a spiritual parent to help them eat a well-rounded diet. A spiritual young adult is completely able to feed themselves on a disciplined diet. They are able to feed themselves spiritual “meat” (1 Cor. 3:2). A spiritual parent is one who feeding themselves well and is feeding a spiritual infant and child also.

These stages of spiritual maturity strongly correlate with how well we feed ourselves through prayer and study of God’s Word. The inductive studies provided here aim to help the believer to feed themselves and, eventually, to feed others. When a spiritual adult is ready to start feeding a spiritual child, they enter a new phase of spiritual maturity—what Jim Putman calls “spiritual parenting.”¹ The goal of every believer should be to feed a young believer who will grow up to also be a spiritual parent.

Training a Spiritual Infant

If you are a Discippler, it is paramount that your disciple learns quickly how to interact with the text of Scripture. A young Christian is capable of picking up the habits and tools necessary for learning how to feed themselves spiritually. New disciples should not be given Bible-*reading* goals but Bible-*study* goals. Reading shorter passages while making specific observations is far more valuable than reading large portions of Scripture with little understanding. Below you will find suggested tools for conducting personal Bible study.

The Bible should be a believer’s first devotional book. Too many times we hand a new believer a devotional book and they fail to pick up good study habits. I recommend reading the spiritual classics such as Isaac Watts’ *A Guide to Prayer* or Thomas Watson’s *The Art of Divine Contentment*. (See List of Spiritual Classics). Generally, modern devotional books do not exemplify good Bible study habits. Thankfully, several recent authors have picked up on the need for inductive interaction with Scripture and are making good efforts to write inductive-based Bible studies. Nonetheless, there is nothing like doing your own investigation – just you, your marker, and your Bible.

¹ *Real-Life Discipleship Training*

Growth through Inductive Bible Study

The surest sign of maturity is growth. Every believer should be driven to grow spiritually and relationally. There are many spiritual disciplines that foster growth, but chief among them is the study of God's Word. The collection of inductive Bible studies below aims to inspire believers to engage and interact with God's Word in a productive and memorable way. Merely reading the Bible does not produce drastic personal growth. We must be what Robert Traina calls "a Scripture detective," one who discovers the key clues to understanding the Bible.² Just like a detective, the student of Scripture uses inductive reasoning to understand the message of Scripture.³

What is **Inductive Bible Study**? Inductive Bible Study is studying the Bible by making observations from the text of Scripture, asking yourself questions from those observations, and making application for your life. Inductive study allows the Bible to speak for itself without the use of commentaries and other deductive resources.

There are three basic steps in inductive Bible study:

1. Observation

Like a detective, our study of the Bible begins with observing clues that will help us understand a passage. We will consider later how to identify these clues.

2. Asking Questions

Once we have gathered some key clues, we are ready to ask questions raised by those clues. Inductive study allows the Bible to raise the questions. For instance, the Book of Revelation begins with the descriptive phrase: "The revelation of Jesus Christ." This raises the question of what the Book of Revelation reveals about Jesus Christ. What does the book reveal about Jesus Christ? An inductive study of Revelation would include reading the entire book and looking for more clues that reveal Jesus Christ to us.

3. Application

Inductive study is never complete without applying God's Word to our own lives. Inductive study should end with the question, "So what?" What difference do the truths I have discovered make in my life? A person who is passionate about growing spiritually will be eager to apply God's Word. Be careful, however, in your strong desire to apply God's Word that you do not rush to conclusions without first carefully observing what the Bible says and means. If you do not yet have a passionate desire to apply God's Word, then pray earnestly and work on the Bible studies here marked "Beginner." It is my belief that Bible study and prayer are worth doing until you learn to love it.

² Robert A. Traina, *Methodical Bible Study* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1980), 3.

³ One should be aware that there is no such thing as "pure induction," that is, reading a text without any preconception of what we are reading. The purpose of this paper is to provide prompts for your own inductive study.

Choosing a Bible

First, these studies require what I teasingly call “a real Bible”—that is a non-digital, hardcopy of the Bible. While the Beginner studies may be conducted with a digital Bible, the more advanced studies will require you to have a physical copy of the Bible.

Second, I recommend purchasing a **wide-margin, double-columned English Standard Version**. The studies included here are based on the ESV although they may just as well be used with the New American Standard Version or any other translation. Whichever translation you choose, make sure the Bible you choose has a wide margin so you can write notes. Your goal is to be so intentional in your Bible study that your Bible tells a story about you.

Using Other Resources in Addition to the Bible

There are two types of Bible study resources—inductive and deductive. We are focused on inductive methods and resources here, but higher levels of Bible study will require the use of some “deductive” sources such as Bible commentaries.

Inductive Resources

Inductive resources are those that provide information without offering opinions or interpretations of the information. Bible maps, concordances, and Bible dictionaries would be included in this category. Here are some inductive resources I recommend:

Nelson’s New Illustrated Bible Dictionary (2014)

Nelsons’s Complete Book of Bible Maps and Charts (2010)

Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance: The 21st Century Edition (2001)

Deductive Resources

Deductive resources give information and offer opinions and interpretations. These are resources that should be used *only after* you have made your observations of a passage. Deductive resources include commentaries, Bible handbooks, theological dictionaries, and handbooks. The least deductive of these are Background Commentaries such as the *IVP Bible Background Commentary*. These provide helpful cultural and historical information that we would not know simply from reading the Bible. For Bible commentaries on a particular book of the Bible, I recommend looking at www.bestcommentaries.com.

Listening to the Holy Spirit and the Word

The Bible is God’s speech to us. That thought alone ought to put us in awe of the gift we have in the Bible. The Bible itself tells us that it must be understood with the help of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 2:12-14). Bible study, therefore, should be accompanied with prayer and meditation, else it is merely

an exercise in academics. Believers through the ages have experienced the aid of the Holy Spirit in understanding Scripture by practicing two methods.

1. Meditation on God's Word. Meditation means placing the Scriptures before your eyes and simply allowing its words to sink into your mind. It is during this time that the Holy Spirit can cause you to see something you didn't see before.
2. Praying in response to God's Word. Praying for the Spirit's help to live out what you are studying is a sure way to remember what God has said. The two spiritual disciplines of meditation and prayer must accompany our study of Scripture. I recommend reading Isaac Watt's spiritual classic *A Guide to Prayer*.

Tools for Inductive Bible Study

1. A wide-margin, double-columned English Standard Version Bible.
2. A set of Bible highlighters such as the Bible Marking Kit by Zebrite (available in four or five color sets). For more advanced study, Feela Bible Gel highlighters are available in eight colors. Both packs may be used together.
3. A set of fine-print (.4mm or less), colored pens such as the G-Tech-C4 ultra fine set by Pilot (available in sets of five, ten, and twelve).
4. A set of erasable, colored pens such as the Frixion (.7mm) ballpoint pens by Pilot (available in seven colors).
5. A small straight edge such as that provided in the Zebrite kit mentioned above.
6. Access to inductive study resources such as those published by Nelson and mentioned above.
7. Access to a Bible Background Commentary such as those published by Zondervan or Intervarsity Press.

How to Use the Tools

1. Designate each color for a single theme throughout your Bible. This allows for quick reference. Here is an example:

Yellow	=	Prayer and Worship
Green	=	People of God/The Church
Red	=	Sin and Salvation
Pink	=	Eschatology
Light Blue	=	Holy Spirit
Dark Blue	=	Holy Fellowship with God

Purple	=	The Kingdom of God
Orange	=	Notes on historical context
Brown	=	The Land
Black	=	General Notations that don't fit any particular category

2. **Highlighting:** When using a highlighter, highlight only the words while leaving white space between the lines above and below. You may use the space between the lines to make other markings.
3. **Note-taking:** Use your fine-point pen with a ruler in order to keep your notes neat and straight while maximizing the space in your Bible. I recommend writing in all CAPS since capital letters are all formed above the line of the ruler (the small letters g, j, p, q, and y drop below the line).
4. Write your notes in the margin with the same color of pen that matches the color of your marks in the text. This allows you to see how your margin notes correlate with your text markings.
5. Use an erasable pen when taking notes during a sermon or Bible study.
6. **Underlining:** I recommend using the straightedge to underline words.
7. **Boxing:** I recommend using the straightedge to draw a box around a passage of several verses in place of underlining a large passage. Draw your box completely around the passage using the inside and outside margins.
8. **Bracketing:** Bracketing is the same as boxing except your mark is uses only the outside margin.

Inductive Bible Study Actions

If you have read the preceding instructions, you are now ready to explore your Bible with your Bible study tools. Here are some of the basic actions taken in inductive Bible study. All or some of these actions may be applied to every passage of Scripture.

1. **Tracking**
Tracking means tracing the repetition of words, phrases, or concepts through a passage. Some studies track a theme through the entire Bible while others track a concept within a single passage. For example, track the phrase "in Christ" through the book of Ephesians.
2. **List and Sorting**
Making a list of or sorting out what you have tracked is a meaningful, inductive exercise. There are many kinds of lists that can be made from your observations and tracking. Suggestions will be given with each inductive Bible study in this collection. For example, identify the key verbs and verb phrases that go with each appearance of the phrase "in Christ" in the book of

Ephesians. You will notice verbs such as “are faithful” (1:1), “chose” (1:4), and “to unite all things” (1:10).

3. Categorize

If you have composed a list, you may want to categorize the items on the list. Usually categories suggest themselves once you look at your list. You will see that several items on your list clearly fit together while other items stand alone. For example, you are now ready to categorize the verbs and verb phrases from the previous exercise. You may have categories such as: A) Phrases that describe God’s actions toward us in Christ; and b) Phrases that describe our actions in Christ.

4. Title

Giving titles for your observations is a helpful method for memorization and correlating information. This includes naming the individual stories (called pericopes) in the Bible to giving names to chapters through a book of the Bible. This allows for you to see patterns emerge from Scripture.

5. Correlate

Correlation is another way of seeing how a word, phrase, or concept relates to other words, phrases, and concepts around it (these are called *structural relationships*). There are several ways to correlate:

a. Compare and/or Contrast

Words and concepts often relate to one another by comparison or contrast. The Bible uses these two relationships very frequently by using conjunctions such as “but” and “than” and the adverbs “like” and “as”. Our observations should include noticing how words and concepts relate to other words and concepts in the passage. For example, in Psalm 1, how is the blessed man like a tree?

b. Cause and Effect

Cause and effect are often indicated by the use of the conjunction “therefore,” or sometimes just “for” or the phrase “so that.”

c. Series

Take note of series such as the series of virtues listed in Galatians 5:22-23. You will notice that this series is contrasted with the series of vices in Galatians 5:19-21 as indicated by the conjunction “but” that begins verse 22.

d. Correlation with other Scripture verses.

As you read and study, other Scriptures will come to mind. Be especially aware of phrases that are repeated from a previous passage. For example, the phrase “then you will know that I am the LORD” appears dozens of times in Ezekiel and is drawn from the book of Exodus where the same phrase appears many times.

For a more complete list of structural relationships, see Robert Traina, *Methodical Bible Study*, pp. 50-52.

6. Interpret

The first goal of Bible study is to discover the meaning of God's Word. Therefore, we must eventually reach the step of interpretation. What does this passage mean? The meaning of Scripture is usually very apparent after some study. Occasionally, there are passages whose meaning requires more significant study of the cultural and literary background—the Book of Revelation is a good example. Interpretation includes being able to explain what a word, phrase, and concept mean in relation to the rest of the passage.

7. Apply

The final goal of Bible study is to apply the meaning of the Bible to our lives. We have not honored God's Word fully until we have applied what it means.

About this Collection of Inductive Studies

The first inductive Bible study I remember doing was tracking the phrase “in Christ” through the Letter to the Ephesians (a study included here). From then I have attempted to collect ideas from my own study of Scripture and from others. The collection here is almost exclusively from my own experience.

The individual studies are rated in three levels: Beginner, Intermediate, and Advanced. Beginner studies consist largely of tracking words and phrases, and making lists. Intermediate studies include tracking simple concepts, categorization, and correlation. Advanced studies are just more complex studies of the same exercises.

The title of each Bible study may be found in the left margin below the level indicator. Each study consists of a brief description and instructions of how to conduct the study. Remember, when in doubt about whether to mark a passage or not, leave it unmarked or else mark it with an erasable pen or erasable highlighter.

STUDIES FOR NEW DISCIPLES

That You May Believe

Read a chapter from the Gospel of John each day for 16 days. **Track** every appearance of the word “believe.” Highlight every appearance and variation of the word “believe” in PINK and outline it in GREEN. Include appearances of “unbelief” also. Highlight the entirety of John 20:31 in PINK and underline it in GREEN. This key verse for the entire Gospel of John.

Who is Jesus?

Read a chapter from the Gospel of Matthew each day for 28 days. **Track** the concept of who Jesus is. Each day, answer the question in your journal: “Who does this chapter say Jesus is?” Take note of what Jesus is called, what he does, and what he says about himself.

Questions in Mark

Read a chapter from the Gospel of Mark each day for 16 days. **Track** all of the questions through the Gospel of Mark. Use an erasable pen of any color to underline every question. **Sort** out the questions that have to do with who Jesus is. Make a **list** of these questions with the answer (if it is given in the text).

Wisdom from Proverbs

Read a chapter from the Book of Proverbs each day for 31 days. Each day, write out a verse or passage that you find meaningful in a journal.

STUDIES IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

Beginner

Prayers

Track every prayer through the Old Testament. Highlight each prayer in YELLOW.

Intermediate

Advanced

The Exodus

Begin by reading Exodus 1-19 (from Moses' birth to Israel's arrival at Sinai). Then read the rest of the Old Testament while **tracking** every reference to the Exodus event. Since the Exodus is a salvation event, write EXODUS in the margin with a RED fine-point pen. Mark all:

- References to Israel's enslavement in Egypt;
- References to Passover;
- References to the Feast of Unleavened Bread;
- References to coming out of Egypt;
- References to the crossing of the Red Sea.
- References to God meeting Moses and Israel at Sinai;
- References to the fire and cloud by which God led Israel;
- Any other allusion to the events of Exodus 1-19.

NOTE: Passages such as Psalm 78 count as a single reference.

The Land

Track the theme of "Land" through the Old Testament. Underline in BROWN every reference pertaining to the promise of land to Israel. This includes many passages where the land is taken from Israel because of their sin. Longer passages may be bracket in the margin such as the following example:

Isaiah 14 *The Restoration of Jacob*

1 For the LORD will have compassion on Jacob and will again choose Israel, and will set them in their own land, and sojourners will join them and will attach themselves to the house of Jacob.

2 And the peoples will take them and bring them to their place, and the house of Israel will possess them in the LORD's land as male and female slaves. They will take captive those who were their captors, and rule over those who oppressed them.

GENESIS

EXODUS

LEVITICUS

NUMBERS

DEUTERONOMY

JOSHUA

JUDGES

RUTH

1 & 2 SAMUEL

1 & 2 KINGS

1 & 2 CHRONICLES

EZRA

NEHEMIAH

ESTHER

JOB

Beginner

The Fool

Circle every appearance of the wicked or foolish man with your RED fine-point pen.

Intermediate

Job's Comforters

Underline in GREEN each of Job's descriptions of his comforters.

Advances

False Accusation

Box in with your RED fine-point pen the arguments of Job's friends that his suffering was caused by his sin.

Self-Defense

Box in with your BLUE fine-point pen Job's counter-claims that sin was not the cause of his suffering.

PSALMS

Beginner

Attributes of God

Track every description of God in the Book of Psalms highlighting them in BLUE.

Intermediate

The "Enemies" of God

Track every description of sinners in the Book of Psalms highlighting them in PINK.

Consequences

Track the consequences of sin as described through the Book of Psalms. Underline the consequences with a RED or PINK fine-point pen or highlighter.

PROVERBS

Beginner

The Tongue

Track what the Book of Proverbs has to say about our speech. Use your BLUE highlighter or fine-point pen to bracket these verses.

Intermediate

Wise and Evil Speech

Compose a list of verses that describe evil speech and a list of verses that describe good speech.

ECCLESIASTES

Beginner

Under the Sun

Mark each occurrence of the phrase "under the sun."

Vanity of Vanities

Mark each occurrence of the word "vanity."

Questions

Mark each question asked by the Preacher.

SONG OF SOLOMON

ISAIAH

Beginner

Lord of Hosts

Underline in PURPLE every appearance of the phrase “the Lord of hosts.”

Holy One of Israel

Underline in BLUE every appearance of the phrase “Holy One of Israel”

Intermediate

Invocation

Mark every passage in church God’s “name” is invoked.

Advanced

False Gods

Mark every appearance of a false god. Make a list of descriptions of these gods.

JEREMIAH

Intermediate

False Gods

Highlight in PINK all references to the false, worthless, and abominable gods to which Israel turned in place of God.

LAMENTATIONS

EZEKIEL

Beginner

Then you will know

Track the phrase “then you will know that I am the LORD” through the book of Ezekiel. Underline each occurrence in BLUE. Occasionally the subject is something other than “you,” but mark those also.

Rebellious House

Track the phrase “rebellious house” through the book of Ezekiel. This phrase is used to describe Israel. Highlight the phrase in GREEN and outline it in PINK.

Intermediate

The Land

Track the theme of the Promised Land through the book of Ezekiel.

Advanced

DANIEL

Beginner

Names of God

Track the various titles and names for God in the book of Daniel. Highlight each title and name in BLUE. The names of God in Daniel tell us a lot about what the main idea of the book is.

List the names you find. HINT: All of the names are phrases (such as "the Ancient of Days") Which titles are repeated most frequently?

Intermediate

An Active God

List the actions of God through the book of Daniel. Divide the actions into actions of mercy and actions of judgment. To whom does God show mercy and to whom does He show judgment?

Advanced

The Kingdom

What does God reveal about His saving reign (His kingdom) in the book of Daniel? Mark in PURPLE all of the key concepts about the kingdom of God.

What attributes of God are especially highlighted in the book of Daniel? **List** the divine attributes you see (either explicitly or implicitly) in the book of Daniel.

HOSEA

JOEL

AMOS

OBADIAH

JONAH

MICAH

NAHUM

HABAKKUK

ZEPHANIAH

HAGGAI

ZECHARIAH

Beginner

Zion

Mark each appearance of the words "Jerusalem" and "Zion."

Advanced

Messiah

Highlight in ORANGE each Messianic passage.

MALACHI

STUDIES IN THE NEW TESTAMENT BOOKS

Entire New Testament

Beginner

One Anothers

Track how believers ought to behave toward one another in the New Testament. Highlight in GREEN each appearance of a phrase that includes “one another” in reference to how a believer’s behavior toward others. Example:

2 Corinthians 13:11 Finally, brothers, rejoice. Aim for restoration, **comfort one another, agree with one another**, live in peace.

Categorize each “One Another” command into one of three categories:

1. “Best Applied in a Worship Service”
2. “Best Applied in a Small Group”
3. “Best Applied in One-on-One Situations”

Intermediate

One Anothers

List and Categorize all of the “One Another” phrases you have highlighted previously. You may consider divided them into two lists—positive commands and negative commands. Some commands may fit in multiple categories.

Advanced

One Anothers

Apply the “One Another” commands by writing out a description of how you can live each one in a practical way.

GOSPEL OF MATTHEW

Beginner

Kingdom of God

Track every appearance of the phrases “Kingdom of God” and “Kingdom of heaven” in the Gospel of Matthew. Highlight in GREEN each appearance of the phrase.

Interpret the “Kingdom of God” and “Kingdom of heaven” by reading each appearance of these phrases and mentally replacing it with the phrase “the saving reign of God.” **List** the verses that are especially illuminated by this interpretation.

Son of Man

Track every appearance of the phrases “Son of David,” “Son of Man,” and “Son of God” in the Gospel of Matthew. Box in each phrase in PURPLE. Example:

Matthew 13:37 He answered, “The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man.”

Intermediate

Kingdom of God

Categorize each appearance of the phrases “Kingdom of God” and “Kingdom of heaven” into one of two categories:

1. The Kingdom Present (the phrase “at hand” means “here now”).
2. The Kingdom Yet-to-Come

Son of Man

List and **Categorize** each description of the Son of Man into one of two categories:

1. The humiliation of the Son of Man
2. The exaltation of the Son of Man

Advanced

Kingdom of God

List the requirements for entering the kingdom of God/heaven.

List the benefits of entering the kingdom of God/heaven.

List the evidence Jesus gives that the kingdom has arrived with Him.

Son of Man

List and **Compare** Matthew’s use of “Son of Man” with Daniel 7:13-14.

GOSPEL OF MARK

Beginner

Questions

Use an erasable pen to mark every question posed by Mark. How many questions does he ask in his Gospel?

Intermediate

Questions

Make a chart of the questions that appear in Mark's Gospel. Include a column in which you write who asked the question. Include a column that names to whom the question is posed. Finally, include a column with an answer to the question when possible.

GOSPEL OF LUKE

Intermediate

Discipleship

Mark every description of a "disciple" and make a list of requirements.

GOSPEL OF JOHN

Beginner

Believe

Track every appearance of the word "believe" in the Gospel of John. Include every variation of the word including unbelief.

Truth

Track every appearance of the word "truth" in the Gospel of John, including variations of the word.

ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

Beginner

Actions of the Spirit

Track every action of the Holy Spirit through the Book of Acts. Highlight in GREEN and box in with BLUE every action of the Holy Spirit. Example:

Acts 2:4 And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance.

Intermediate

Actions of the Spirit

List and Categorize all of the actions of the Holy Spirit in the Book of Acts, taking note of what actions appear most frequently.

Advanced

Actions of the Spirit

List the results of the frequent actions of the Holy Spirit in the Book of Acts. For example, in the above example of Acts 2:4, the result of being “filled with the Holy Spirit” is speaking in other tongues.

ROMANS

1 CORINTHIANS

2 CORINTHIANS

GALATIANS

Beginner

EPHESIANS

Beginner

In Christ

Box in with your BLUE pen or highlighter each occurrence of the phrase "in Christ."

Intermediate

Belief and Unbelief

Read Ephesians 5:1-16 and identify the three contrasting terms that describe believers and unbelievers. Hint: Identify the terms given for believers and then determine what the opposing terms are.

PHILIPPIANS

COLOSSIANS

1 THESSALONIANS

Beginner

Christian Brotherhood

Track every appearance and variation of the word "brother." This is Paul's primary term for the Christians in Thessalonica. Highlight each occurrence in GREEN.

2 THESSALONIANS

Beginner

Christian Brotherhood

Track every appearance and variation of the word "brother." This is Paul's primary term for the Christians in Thessalonica. Highlight each occurrence in GREEN.

1 TIMOTHY
2 TIMOTHY
TITUS
PHILEMON
HEBREWS
JAMES
1 PETER
2 PETER
1 JOHN
2 JOHN
3 JOHN

Beginner

Beloved

Notice how John addresses his readers in this short letter. Mark every occurrence of the word "Beloved" with a GREEN highlighter.

Intermediate

Section Titles

Make a list of commands given in the three sections marked by the direct address "Beloved."

JUDE
REVELATION

Beginner

Seven Churches

Use your erasable pen to circle the cities in which the churches addressed by John are located. Find these churches on a map at the back of your Bible.

Conquerors

Underline in PURPLE every appearance of the phrase "to the one who conquers" in Revelation chapters 2-3.

Advanced

Christ

Make a list of descriptions of Christ from the Book of Revelation. Include the reference for each description.

