

The "OICA" Methodology of Bible Study (P. Rhebergen)

OICA is an acronym representing the four steps of an inductive Bible study:

- 1 - **Observation** - What is being said?
- 2 - **Interpretation** - What is being meant?
- 3 - **Correlation** - Where else is it being said and / or explained?
- 4 - **Application** - What will I do about what is being said?

I have added a fifth step to the above which, while closely related to the step of applying what you have learned to your life, is more of a stand alone practice whose sole purpose is to keep God's word at the forefront of your mind.

- 5 - **Meditation** - Keeping the Bible and what it teaches on your mind.

Inductive Bible study is that Bible study which occurs when the passage being studied is allowed to speak to us, our conclusions being drawn from the passage. It is the opposite of deductive Bible study, that which forms conclusions prior to the Bible study and searches the Bible for support for these conclusions, often taking passages out of their context in the process. In performing inductive Bible study we are reading data from the passage, while in performing deductive Bible study we are reading data into the passage.

Step 1: Observation

Read the passage being studied several times in order to get a good feel for the details. Act as though you are reading this passage for the first time and observe all the facts. Ask questions of the passage:

- 1 - Who is involved?
- 2 - What are they doing?
- 3 - Where are they? Where are they going?
- 4 - When did this happen, what happened before, what will happen afterwards.
- 5 - Why is this happening, what happened to lead up to this event?
- 6 - Had this been foretold?

More questions may be found in the section on the Chapter Analysis Method of Bible study. Observation is crucial in obtaining a good understanding of any given Bible passage, in order for it to be effective we must learn to avoid the following traps:

1.1 - **Speed reading**. Often, either through familiarity, boredom, or lack of time, we tend to rush through a passage. We must learn to take our time, extracting from the text every detail.

1.2 - **Trusting our memory**. Too seldom do we actually write down what we are seeing in the Bible's pages, our memory for detail will be greatly enhanced once we start to take notes during the observation process.

1.3 - **Giving up**. Just because we have already studied a given text does not mean that we know all there is to know about it. Simply because we have not studied the Bible in a classroom environment, or have not gone to Bible college, it does not mean that our Bible study will be ineffective. It is God who rewards the student, as we gain experience in Bible study we will still need to rely on His guiding hand, our mind will simply be better at doing the work of Bible study.

1.4 - **Immediate application.** Many passages of Scripture may seem to be easily understood, especially to those who read the Bible frequently. In some cases this may not be out of place but in general the point of Bible study is to put off application until we fully understand what we have been studying. The danger of immediate application is that we tend to apply what the passage means to us personally rather than what the author intended the passage to mean to all.

Some of these questions will lead to the next step of interpretation but that is not the goal during the observation step, what you are attempting here is to get a good understanding of the flow of the passage, its surrounding events, its characters – you are in short looking for every detail you can find. Take your time through this stage, as it is foundational to the overall impact of the study.

Step 2: Interpretation

Regard the passage as though you are a detective, studying the passage for any clues that can help to answer the following questions:

2.1 - What does this passage mean, what is being said? Attempt to discover the actual meaning of the passage.

2.2 - What was the author trying to say to his original readers, how would the original readers have understood this passage?

2.3 - What is the author trying to say to me? Keep in mind that there is often significant distance (historical, political, societal, cultural, geographical, covenantal and positional to name just a few) between the original readers and us.

2.4 - Why is this here, what is the theological significance of the text?

Keep in mind that: **When the plain sense of Bible makes common sense, seek no other sense, you might find nonsense.** The Bible was written for normal people to understand, not merely the super intelligent or those who (according to some cults) claim an additional knowledge not generally given to all. Don't look for hidden meanings unless you have good reason to think there is further meaning that is not obvious or indicated by the surrounding context. This means that we are not to modify the plain sense of the Bible when it contradicts our treasured beliefs but must instead modify even our treasured beliefs when the teaching of the Bible is against them. Remember also to ask questions, Christianity is not a faith for the intellectually challenged and our God is not a God who acts in a manner that is beyond our ability to understand, though He often acts in ways that are beyond our capacity to understand. We can ask questions of all that we read in the Bible and expect reasonable answers that we are able to understand and that are consistent with teachings elsewhere in the Bible.

Some general principles of interpretation are:

1 - Interpret the Bible by the Bible, refer to parallel passages, noting both differences and similarities.

2 - Research the words recalling that even in English the meanings of various words will change over time. Remember, too, that different words may be used to convey similar concepts, such as our use of acquaintance, friend, intimate friend, girlfriend & boyfriend, fiancée, wife & husband, or parent & child to define various aspects of the love relationship between humans.

3 - Evaluate the use of grammar, why were the words put together as they have been? Would another idea have been conveyed if the grammar had been different?

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- 4 - Carefully consider the context of the verse, passage, paragraph, chapter and book. Context is either near (in the same body of text) or remote (in a removed portion of text).
- 5 - Discover what the author's intent was in writing what you are reading. For example: Paul's letters generally convey the occasion of each letter, as do some of the gospels, for other writing you may have to do some research.
- 6 - Study the background of the book of which your study passage is a part by use of Bible dictionaries, encyclopaedias, maps, etc.
- 7 - Consider the author's themes in other writings. For example: Does Revelation have anything to offer to our study of the Gospel of John.
- 8 - Evaluate how you would understand the writer if they were communicating directly with you. What would you most immediately understand his meaning?

Step 3: Correlation

Correlation can actually be part of interpretation and is frequently done simultaneously. When you correlate, you are bringing up sections from other parts of the chapter, book, or entire Bible that help you to understand the section you are studying and are operating on the principle that: **The Bible is its own best interpreter**. An example of correlation would be to refer to parallel passages in the synoptic gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) during a study of the gospel of John. A concordance, cross reference system or study Bible (such as the Thompson Chain Reference Bible) will be especially valuable at this stage. Other useful practices in correlation are: paraphrasing the passage, summarizing the passage, outlining the passage, and making charts that relate concepts and ideas in the passage to each other and to other passages dealing with similar ideas. Various uses of these devices will appear in some form or another in the following section on the Bible study methods.

Step 4: Application

Application begins during your study but continues on into your day-to-day living. Bible study without application becomes a stale, intellectual exercise, like sitting in a car without fuel you will not go anywhere. Your spiritual growth will not occur by merely reading the Bible; its truths must be acted out. Do not rush into application until you are sure what the passage says and means, and then adjust your life accordingly. Take steps also to measure your application, evaluate your progress and make the necessary changes in your application. If you are unable to apply the passage, try asking yourself these questions:

- 1 - Is there a command for me to obey?
- 2 - Is there a good example for me to follow?
- 3 - Is there a sin here for me to avoid?
- 4 - Is there something here I want to thank God for?
- 5 - Is there a promise I can call my own?
- 6 - Is there a blessing I can enjoy?

7 - Is there a failure from which I can learn?

8 - Is there a victory for me to win?

9 - Is there a new thought about God, the Lord Jesus, the Holy Spirit, Satan, man?

10 - Is there a truth in this passage that has greatly affected me?

Remember during your study the words of Jesus:

"Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock: "and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock. "But everyone who hears these sayings of Mine, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand: "and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it fell. And great was its fall." (Matthew 7:24-27)

This is a clear warning to all who would learn the Bible that its teaching is for application into one's life in order that that life may be build upon the Solid Rock. It is important to allow change to occur as we read the Bible else we become like the man who built his house on the sand, we hear the words of God but fail to take heed of them and so our life is lost in the storm. Some of the study methods that follow will give you opportunity to note various applications and provide for you to be able to evaluate you application after a certain period of time. If you will follow those prompts you will be able to allow God to change your life through you times of fellowship with Him in the study of His word.

As you begin to apply what you are learning through your Bible studies you will find that you have made some progress toward change in a certain aspect of your life. At this point you may be tempted to stop this particular application process and carry on with another application. Don't. There may always be room for improvement, as Paul has said in his letter to the church in Philippi:

"Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me." (Philippians 3:12)

If you have been prompted by the Holy Spirit toward some change in your life, or He is leading you through such a change, you must not be satisfied with the fact that you may no longer be doing the worst of what the Holy Spirit is leading you away from while continuing to do the less bad aspects of this thing. When God comes to change us He is asking that we eliminate all within us that is contrary to His will, not merely the worst of it.

Step 5: Meditation

We live in an age where entertainment of various types is widely available and it is quite possible to fill all of one's uncommitted time with the enjoyment of these entertainments. While entertainment in and of itself is not a bad thing entertainment becomes bad when it consumes all of our time and it becomes especially bad when it takes from our time with God. You may well ask "How much of my time belongs to God?" The answer is all of it. Every second that you "own" is given to you by God and is His to command. Any activity that takes our time from God is harmful. The Israelites were commanded by God at Mount Sinai to meditate upon the scripture at every opportunity:

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"And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. "You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. "You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. "You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates. (Deuteronomy 6:6-9)

The overwhelming idea of this command was that the words of God would constantly be on the mind of His people. They were to think about God and what He has said at every opportunity. His words were to greet them as they entered their homes. His words were to be on their minds as they lay on their beds. His words were to be their guide as they went about their business. In every aspect of their lives they were to consider the words of God so that no part of their lives would be seen as separated from Him. That this command was not restricted to the Israelites of Moses' day is made evident in Paul's admonition to the church at Colossae:

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. (Colossians 3:16)

Meditation involves a variety of activities, some of which are: Praise, prayer, Scripture memory and worship. We may feel out of place praising God or worshipping Him as we go about our daily tasks but keep in mind the response of Paul and Silas to being unjustly imprisoned, beaten and uncomfortable as they sat on the floor with their feet fastened to stocks:

Then the multitude rose up together against them; and the magistrates tore off their clothes and commanded them to be beaten with rods. And when they had laid many stripes on them, they threw them into prison, commanding the jailer to keep them securely. Having received such a charge, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks. But at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them. (Acts 16:22-25)

Even in prison, in pain and surrounded by criminals of every sort Paul and Silas were unashamedly praising God rather than encouraging each other in feeling sorry for themselves. They were more concerned with God than they were with their circumstance and could therefore praise Him in spite of their circumstance. Similarly the Psalmist, when confronted by the Godlessness of his society could meditate on the magnificent things that God had done in history for Israel and remain assured that all would be well. Regardless of what happened he could rest in the knowledge that God is in control.

Prayer as well is something that we can do throughout our day rather than at set times within the day. We are told in the Bible to pray without ceasing. A song popular in the 1980s was entitled "Make My Life a Prayer to." You interpreted the idea of unceasing prayer as the making of our lives a constant prayer to God. Prayer is not merely asking God for what we want or need. Prayer is communication with God where we lay ourselves open to His will and lay before Him the deepest needs of our hearts (be they the need to praise Him or the need for food). Many people have experienced great fellowship with God simply by praying the portion of the Bible that they have been studying. For example: If you are reading about Paul and Silas as quoted in the above passage you might pray that God would enable you to endure hardship and suffering in the same manner. Or you might pray that you would be able to worship God in every circumstance of your life. The idea is that prayer is not isolated from our lives (and everything we do with our lives) but is a fundamental component of our lives.

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Scripture memory is perhaps the primary aspect of meditation as it relates to Bible study. Of Scripture memory John Ortberg writes that:

Memorizing Scripture is an important part of keeping a mind focused on Christ....The point of memorizing Scripture is not to see how many verses you can memorize. The point is what happens to your mind in the process of rehearsing Scripture. When you are rehearsing statements from Scripture, you are having different thoughts than you would be if you were watching some television show. (John Ortberg's If You Want To Walk On Water, You've Got To Get Out Of The Boat)

Too often we avoid Scripture memory, thinking that it is too hard, that we are too old to being to memorize Scripture, or that with all the resources around today we do not need to memorize the word of God. The verse quoted above from Deuteronomy does not exempt the aged from contemplation of the word of God, nor does it suggest that having a book handy is sufficient to obey the command. The entire emphasis of this is that the followers of God are to be intimately involved with Him and His word. Our knowledge of God and His word is to surpass our knowledge of anything else for there is a life to be lived and we dare not find ourselves unprepared.