

An Inductive Study

By Stephen Presley

Pre-Session Assignments

One week before the session, participants will take the following assignments.

Assignment One

Write at least ten observations about Acts 1:8. Identify any key terms, repeated words, verbs, nouns, pronouns, etc. Avoid mentioning anything in the verses before or after Acts 1:8. Prepare to share your work with the group.

Assignment Two

Look in the back of your Bible or online for a map of the ancient world during the first century (the time when the book of Acts was written). Identify the locations of Jerusalem, Judah, Samaria, and the ends of the earth, and explain how they are related to one another. Read Acts 8:1 and 13:47 and observe any parallels with Acts 1:8. Prepare to share your work with the group.

Assignment Three

Think about the work of the Holy Spirit in your life and write at least three ways you have seen Him directing and ministering to you. Prepare to share your work with the group.

Scripture to Memorize

“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be My witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” Acts 1:8

Session Goal

Consistent with God’s Word and in the power of the Holy Spirit—by the end of this session, disciples will know the steps of the inductive method of Bible study and understand how to apply it to the Christian life.

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Before coming to Southwestern, he lived in Saint Andrews, Scotland, where he played a lot of golf and occasionally studied theology. Stephen is married to Haley, and they have four young children: Isla, Emma, Luke, and Drew, who keep them busy with lots of adventures. He has served in a variety of positions in the church and participated in many mission trips throughout the U.S., Central America, and Europe. Contact him at: spresley@swbts.edu.

It's in the Book

30 minutes

Real-Life Scenario

Have you ever received a text, email, tweet or post from someone special? How closely did you read it? Did you study every word and analyze every emoji? Did you find yourself asking, "What did they mean by that?" or "What were they trying to say in that post?" If so, you have already begun practicing the art of good observation skills. In this lesson we are going to learn a process called inductive Bible study. The first step of the inductive method is learning to observe Scripture closely.

What Is the Inductive Method?

For some people, the Bible can seem overwhelming. It is a huge book composed of 66 smaller books. The Bible contains many different people, places and events. This is why anyone who reads the Bible needs a good strategy. In this lesson you will learn a helpful plan for approaching the Bible called inductive Bible study. This method will teach you to study the text closely in order to discover what God intends to show you in Scripture. The inductive Bible study method has four basic steps:

1. Observation: paying close attention to everything in the passage
2. Interpretation: explaining what the passage means
3. Application: explaining how the text applies to life
4. Correlation: connecting the passage with other texts

Observation involves reading the text closely and paying careful attention to every word. Interpretation includes analyzing what you observed and explaining what the passage means. The general rule is, the more time you spend in observation, the less time you will spend in interpretation. Application is where you apply the biblical passage to your life. Finally, correlation involves looking elsewhere in Scripture to see what other passages correspond to your passage. The great thing about this last step is that it starts the process all over again so that you continue the process of the inductive method on another passage. The following is an example of inductive Bible study.

Read Acts 1:8 out loud.

Step 1: Observation

Studying the Passage

Verse 8. but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be My witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth. Practice observation on Acts 1:8 and look for any repeated words, contrasts or comparisons, lists, and any specific parts of speech including verbs, nouns, pronouns, conjunctions, and prepositions. For example, make specific observations about verbs such as "receive power" or "come upon you." List nouns such as "Holy Spirit" and pronouns such as "My." Explain the function of conjunctions such as "but" and "and" and prepositional phrases such as "in Jerusalem."

Make as many observations as you can. At this stage, try not to make up your mind about meanings. Instead, just observe and think about how this passage might have been understood by the original readers.

Assignment One Feedback

The person who completed **Assignment One** during the week can now share at least ten observations about Acts 1:8.

Step 2: Interpretation

Studying the Passage

Now that you have observed, you can interpret the passage. This step involves explaining the meaning of the passage in its original setting and according to the original author. Good practice calls for looking up key terms, including any geographical, historical or cultural terms in a printed or online Bible dictionary or encyclopedia.

Verse 8. but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you. Consider questions such as these: What is the relationship between “power” and the “Holy Spirit”? What is the Spirit empowering the apostles to do? **you will be My witnesses.** What are “witnesses,” and what do you think they are testifying about? What does the pronoun “My” tell us about the witnesses? **both in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.** How do the geographical terms relate to one another? What are the geographical stages of the mission of God? In general, this passage teaches the important relationship between the Spirit of God and the mission of God. When the Spirit comes, the people of God will be prepared to head out and proclaim the gospel.

Steps 3 and 4: Application and Correlation

Studying the Passage

Now that we have observed and interpreted Acts 1:8, think of ways the text applies to your life. We may not live in Jerusalem or Samaria, but we have the same Spirit and the same call to go and proclaim the gospel. The mission that began in Acts 1:8 continues in us as witnesses of the same Christ when we share our faith in Christ every day.

After considering application, practice looking for correlations. There are direct correlations between Acts 1:8; Acts 8:1; and Acts 13:47. In Acts 8:1, the apostles were scattered to Judah and Samaria after persecution broke out against the church in Jerusalem. Then in Acts 13, Paul began his first missionary journey to preach to the Gentiles and “bring salvation to the end of the earth” (Acts 13:47). The connection between these passages shows how the mission of God progressed throughout the book of Acts, just as the Lord said in Acts 1:8.

There are also other correlations between Acts 1:8 and the rest of the book of Acts. Trying reading through Acts 2:1–12 and notice the connections between the Spirit and the geographical places. Read Acts 5:27–33 and see how the work of the Spirit gave the apostles boldness. What other correlations can you identify, even outside the book of Acts?

Assignment Two Feedback

The person who completed **Assignment Two** during the week can now share the locations of Jerusalem, Judah, Samaria and the ends of the earth.

Assignment Three Feedback

The person who completed **Assignment Three** during the week can now share at least three ways they have seen the Holy Spirit directing and ministering.

Discussion Question

What are some of the ways the Holy Spirit has empowered and directed your life?

On Your Own

Read Mark 1:14–15. In the space below, work through the steps of the inductive Bible study method related to the passage. Remember to observe, observe, and observe!

Heart and Hands

8 minutes

Read again the **Real-Life Scenario** near the beginning of the lesson. Consider whether your answers have changed during the session.

Be silent for two or three minutes. Thank Jesus for His sacrifice and for the gospel. Adore Him for His glorious reign on the throne of heaven. Then ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to you:

1. A way the Scriptures you studied today will change your heart for the glory of Christ.
2. Or a way those Scriptures will lead you to stop doing something for the glory of Christ.
3. Or a way those Scriptures will lead you to do something for the glory of Christ.

Write what the Spirit reveals to you below and then be ready to share what you have written with the group.

Since Last Week

5 minutes

Give the group this update: "In our last session I made a commitment to . . . I want to let you know how that turned out. On that same issue I think the Holy Spirit now is leading me to . . ."

Grace-Filled Accountability

5 minutes

Disciples can agree on a way to hold one another accountable. Confessing faults with other disciples allows them to offer grace, insights, and encouragement. Even more important is confession to Christ, the source of true forgiveness and cleansing.

Planning for Evangelism, Missions, and Service

5 minutes

Groups of disciples always are making preparations for evangelism, missions, and service. Use these minutes to work on the next plan.

Prayer

7 minutes

Every disciple will pray aloud, offering praise to Jesus, thanking Him specifically for His gracious acts, making heartfelt confession, committing to actions flowing from the Bible study, praying toward evangelism locally and globally, and interceding for others as prompted by the Holy Spirit.

At Home: Nail It Down

This lesson presented the importance of the inductive method of Bible study. This method is a great way to read and discover what God has revealed to us in the Bible. Memorize these four basic steps:

1. Observation: paying close attention to everything in the passage
2. Interpretation: explaining what the passage means
3. Application: explaining how the text applies to life
4. Correlation: connecting the passage with other texts

The first, and perhaps most important, step is observation. Learn to slow down and read closely, paying attention to every word and phrase. Even after you think you are finished observing, go back and observe more. Consider writing the text on a piece of paper and circling and underlining key words and terms.

When you have finished observing the text, move on to interpretation. Start by explaining what the passage means and looking up any key terms or words in a good Bible dictionary or encyclopedia. Once you have finished interpreting, go to a printed or online Bible commentary and compare your interpretation. Your church leaders can help you choose a commentary that is faithful to God's Word. Remember the general rule that the more time spent in observation, the less time you will spend in interpretation.

After you have finished observing and interpreting the passage, apply its teaching to your life. This step moves from the meaning of the text to what the text means for your life. Explain how the passage applies directly to you and your walk with Christ.

The last step is correlation, which also helps start the process all over again. For this last step, look elsewhere in Scripture to see what other passages you can find that relate to your passage. Work through the process again and continue to observe, interpret, apply, and correlate your passage!

Follow up Question

What are the four basic steps of inductive Bible study?

The Making Disciples curriculum is a gift from Southwestern Seminary to those who, for the glory of the Father and in the power of the Spirit, will spend a lifetime embracing the full supremacy of the Son, responding to His kingly reign in all of life, inviting Christ to live His life through them, and joining Him in making disciples among all peoples.