How to Dig into Scripture Ourselves

Begin with **a copy of the study passage, a study journal**, and **this guide**.

Step One: Start with Prayer

Prayer shifts your attention away from everyday concerns toward Scripture and toward our divine teacher, the Holy Spirit.

How to:

1. **Write a prayer** you'll use each time you study. In it, ask God:
   - To open your eyes, ears, and heart to see, hear, and understand the message in the passage for you right now.
   - For the Holy Spirit's wisdom and guidance as you identify and dig into **one aspect** of the passage.
2. **Pray** this prayer **every time** you study this passage.

You can use the same prayer each time you study, regardless of the passage, or create different prayers for different passages.

If you have trouble remembering to start with prayer (as I do!), write the prayer on a notecard and use it as a bookmark in your study journal. Train yourself to read it each time you open your journal.

Step Two: Survey the Study Passage

"Surveying" introduces you to the study passage. Working with the Holy Spirit, you'll choose **one** aspect of the passage to dig most deeply into (your "personal treasure").

How to:

1. Carefully **read** the passage verses and **look** for words, phrases, or sentences that evoke a ***"huh?"*** or ***"wow!"*** reaction.
   - **"Huh?"** reactions indicate you **don't clearly understand** what's being said—you may need to **investigate** a word, phrase, or verse to ensure you know what the author meant.
   - **"Wow!"** reactions indicate **amazement** or **connection**—something about the word or phrase **resonates** with you at a deeper level. Maybe you just had a conversation on the same or a similar topic; OR
     the word or phrase is popping up everywhere: in a song on the radio, in a podcast you heard this week, on a billboard on the way to work, etc; OR
     the topic speaks to an important incident or experience in your life.

© 2024-2026 J Cason

2. **Ask the Spirit** to help you **choose one *"Huh?"*** *or* **"*Wow!*"** to use for the rest of this process and, in your study journal, record this "personal treasure," plus the verse(s) from the passage that contain or refer to it ("**focus verse(s)**").

You'll concentrate primarily (but not exclusively) on this treasure and these verse(s) as you complete the remaining steps in this study.

Step Three: Mine Your Treasure

In this step, you'll uncover essential elements from the passage relating to your personal treasure. Be sure to note in your study journal anything the Spirit calls out to you.

How to:

1. Notice the **setting** of the study passage: what information does the author give you about **characters**, **locations**, or **timeframes**?

   These facts, if available, provide clues you'll use to ensure you understand your personal treasure correctly.

2. **Check** the study passage for **four types of emphasis** Bible authors used to highlight important concepts:

   - **Repetition** of certain words or phrases.
     If you're studying a very short passage, ***skim*** *the* ***whole chapter*** *for repetition.*
   - **Comparisons**.
     Look for:
     - ***verbs of being*** where one item is identified as another:
     "I **am** an ambassador in chains" (Eph 6:20);
     - "***of***" denoting association:
     "belt **of** truth"… "breastplate **of** righteousness" (Eph 6:14);
     - two or more items linked with these words/phrases:
     "***like***" or "***as***,"
     "more … ***than***" *or* "***less*** … ***than,***"
     "***better than***" *or* "***worse than***."

     Finally, check for ***contrasts***:
     - "***not like***" or similar phrasing; or
     - discussion of **opposites**.

     Consider the associations made: how is the first item like or unlike the second? If the text doesn't specify, ask the Spirit to help you see similarities or differences.
   - **Lists** of **similar items** *(things, attributes, activities, etc.).*
     These may
     - *appear in* ***a single sentence*** *separated by* ***commas or semicolons*** *or*
     - *be described using* ***similar sentence construction*** *over several paragraphs of text.*

© 2024-2026 J Cason

- Seven types of special statements:

Blessings (statements of good consequences)	**Promises**
Commands	**Requests** directed to characters other than God
Curses (statements of bad consequences)	
Prayers (requests directed to God)	**Warnings**

Consider every emphasized item above, even if it doesn't seem related to your personal treasure. Through study, the Holy Spirit may reveal a connection that isn't immediately obvious.

3. **In your focus verse(s) only**, ask the Spirit to help you discover **causes of action** by locating key words or phrases called ***cause connectors***.
*In most English translations of the Bible, these words/phrases are **always** cause connectors:*

because	***in order to / in order that***	***lest***	***so that***	***therefore***

*In addition, these words **occasionally** function as cause connectors:*

for [because] ***since*** [because] ***so*** [so that] ***that*** [so that] ***to*** [in order to]

When you find occasional cause connectors in your focus verse(s), substitute the corresponding bracketed word or phrase above. If the new sentence makes sense and doesn't change the phrase's meaning based on its context, make a note of the connection you discovered.

After locating a cause connector, note its **action** phrase (noun + verb) and the **reason** for that action. With most connectors, you'll typically find the action **before** the key word/phrase and **reason after** it. For example,

*I went to the store **because** I was out of milk.*

action	*I went to the store*
cause connector	***because***
reason	*I was out of milk.*

Occasionally you may see the order of the statements reversed, but the reason will still follow the key word or phrase: ***Because** I was out of milk, I went to the store.*

However, with the connector ***therefore*** and its synonyms ***so*** and ***hence***, the **reason** usually appears **before** the key word:

For example, *I was out of milk, **therefore** I went to the store.*

reason	*I was out of milk,*
cause connector	***therefore***
action	*I went to the store.*

If you find a connector but are unsure which statement is the reason or action, check a

© 2024-2026 J Cason

few **other translations** of the verse (see **How to Assess Your Conclusions with Trusted Authority** in the *Step Four: Refine Your Perspective* section, below).

4. **In your focus verse(s) only**, ask the Spirit to help you discover **conditions** or **methods** that describe ***how*** the action in those verses took place. For example,
    - Does the author **condition** the action on something else happening? As in, ***if*** / ***when*** *A happens, B also happens*. (e.g., "**Delight** yourself **in the LORD** and **he will give you** the **desires of your heart**." Ps 37:4, emphasis added)
    - Does the author provide a particular **method** by which something happens? For example, specific steps taken to achieve something, or more generally ***by*** or ***through*** attributes or action (e.g., "For **by grace** you have been saved **through faith**…" Eph 2:8, emphasis added)?
    - Do you see any adverbs (*-ly* words) that describe how the action was accomplished?

After discovering and documenting these facts, you may need to further narrow your focus before moving on. If so, take a moment with the Spirit to review your discoveries, asking for clear direction to the treasure God most wants you to focus on going forward.

Step Four: Refine Your Perspective

This step enables you to use the Bible treasures you discover ***as God intended*** by ensuring you interpret them correctly. Keep these four goals in mind as you refine your perspective of your personal treasure:

- Mind the whole message.
- Pursue the author's and his audience's perspective.
- See how *Scripture* interprets Scripture.
- Assess your conclusions with trusted authority.

And remember to document what you discover in your notes.

How to Mind the *Whole* Message:

1. Start with **literal context** (the text around the study passage). Skim the first chapter of the book containing the study passage and one to two chapters on either side of it, looking for the following types of writing:
    - Instructions
    - Law
    - Letter
    - Narrative (story)
    - Poetry, and/or
    - Prophecy (prediction of events)

© 2024-2026 J Cason

2. In your study journal, note the type you found **most prevalent in the book** (the "overall writing type") and any **other types you notice in the study passage**.

Being aware of the author's writing techniques will help you better determine if he meant what he wrote literally or figuratively.

3. Check the chapters surrounding the study passage for anything related to your personal treasure identified in Step 2. If your passage is **narrative**, also consider recorded events leading up to and following the study text and note anything the Spirit emphasizes.

4. Next, review the **introduction** to the book from which the passage was taken. You can find this information immediately before the book in most bound Bible translations or **scan the QR Code**[1] **at right** to access introductions to each book in the English Standard Version translation.

   The introduction usually includes a **rough outline of the whole book**. If you see any references to your personal treasure in this outline, skim those chapters as well.

How to Pursue the *Author's and His Audience's* Perspective:

1. Checking the introduction should provide basic facts about the **historical context** (such as the ***author***, his ***audience***, and ***where***, ***when***, and ***why the book was written***). Journal about what you discover in this resource: what do you have in common with the original audience? How might people in that time and place view things differently than you do?

   Keep in mind God chose the author and his contemporaries for this message because they would best understand it. Therefore, ***the passage cannot mean to us what it could not have meant to them***.

2. God oversaw everything about the Bible, including the author's choice of words. **Choose a few impactful words** from your focus verse(s) and examine them with the **original language tool**[2] accessed through the QR code at right. Using the drop-down menus at the top of the screen, navigate to the appropriate book, chapter, and verse(s). Log what you discover in your study journal.

[1] https://www.blueletterbible.org/study/intros/esv_intros.cfm.
[2] https://biblehub.com/lexicon/genesis/1-1.htm.

© 2024-2026 J Cason

How to See how *Scripture* interprets Scripture:

1. Consult **cross-references** to other Scripture passages connected with the event(s)or topic(s) in your focus verse(s). One of the most widely available sources of these references is ***The Treasury of Scriptural Knowledge*** (TSK), which you can access online with the QR code[3] at left. As with the previous tool above, use the drop-down menus at the top of this site to navigate to the appropriate book, chapter, and verse. Be sure to note anything the Spirit draws to your attention.

How to Assess Your Conclusions with Trusted Authority:

1. Review **other translations** of the verses containing your treasure using the code[4] at right. As before, use the drop-down menus at the top of the site to go to the appropriate verse(s). I like to consult at least one ***word-for-word translation***, one or two ***thought-for-thought translations*** and a ***paraphrase*** version and note anything the Holy Spirit highlights from the differences.
    - ***Word-for-word translations*** are considered most precise because they follow most closely the original flow of Hebrew or Greek as written. While technically more accurate, this can sometimes make them harder to understand. My favorite word-for-word translations are the English Standard Version (ESV), New American Standard Bible (NASB), and the Amplified Bible (AMP).
    - ***Thought-for-thought translations*** are often easier to understand because they're less concerned with precise vocabulary and word order. I prefer the New International Version (NIV) and New Living Translation (NLT) thought-for-thought versions.
    - ***Paraphrase translations*** try to make Scripture most approachable and sometimes incorporate idiomatic or colloquial expressions that may vary—sometimes significantly—from the original text. I usually use the Good News Translation (GNT) paraphrase in my comparisons.
2. After all this, review what you've learned about your personal treasure and your focus verse(s). If you still have questions or would like another perspective on your study, consult one or more **commentaries** on your focus verses. Scan the code[5] at right to explore an extensive collection of free, online commentaries.

[3] https://biblehub.com/tsk/genesis/1-1.htm.
[4] https://biblehub.com/genesis/1-1.htm.
[5] https://www.studylight.org/commentary.html .

© 2024-2026 J Cason

TIP: It's easy to get lost in commentary land! I recommend you narrow your focus to a single verse and a single keyword (for example, in a study of Psalm 23 you might choose verse **1**, and keyword **shepherd**), then use your computer on the https://www.studylight.org/commentary.html website to navigate to the appropriate book, chapter, and verse. There, press **Ctrl [Cmd] +F**, type your keyword into the search box and press **Enter**. Your screen will jump to the first instance of the keyword on that page. You may need to press **Enter** multiple times before you land on actual commentary about the keyword. Keep pressing **Enter** to scroll through the commentaries. When you reach the last instance, pressing **Enter** again will take you back to the beginning: the first instance of the word on the page.

Step Five: Align with Your Treasure

The only way to really master biblical wisdom is to practice it, and God's Word gives us specific instructions on this:

> "All Scripture is God-breathed [given by divine inspiration] and is profitable for **instruction**, for **conviction** [of sin], for **correction** [of error and restoration to obedience], for **training in righteousness** [learning to live in conformity to God's will, both publicly and privately—behaving honorably with personal integrity and moral courage]" (2 Tim 3:16-17 AMP).

How to:

Journal your answers to the following questions:

1. What's the main thing you felt the Spirit **teaching** you in this study?
2. In what way do you feel **convicted** by the Spirit from what you've discovered?
   NOTE: Conviction is **not** the same as condemnation. It's simply the Holy Spirit showing you where you can grow in service to God and others.
3. Which word, phrase, or sentence from the study provides **correction** for your situation?
   Review the Scripture passages (including cross-references if appropriate) the Spirit led you to in this study and choose one to memorize as a reminder of what you discovered here.
4. How will you **practice** aligning your speech, attitudes, or actions with the passage you chose to memorize?
   Brainstorm ways you can conform to the passage you've memorized, then choose one and give it a try!

© 2024-2026 J Cason

If you have questions working through this process, email me at jen@jencason.com or scan the code at right[6] to message me from my website. While you're there, be sure to check out my current online study blog!

May God bless you as you dig into Scripture yourself!

[6] https://www.jencason.com/contact-jen/.

© 2024-2026 J Cason