

Adult Forum February 21, 2010
30-minute Bible Study

Elements and procedure:

1. **Select a passage:** a reasonable unit that is short enough to study in depth and think about but also long enough to provide context and show a complete movement, usually less than a chapter but more than a verse or two.
2. **Read some commentary to introduce you to the passage.** What type of literature is it? Is there a historic context, a situation in life? Are there similar passages elsewhere in the Bible? Do I need to know more about particular words? What is this passage's context within that book of the Bible? Is there anything else I should know before going forward?
3. **Trace the movement of the passage.** How does it develop? By what steps? Where does it start, where end up, and how does it get there?
4. **What images are used?** How are they used? It matters that we follow the way the image is actually used in the passage and not just go off with anything we might make of it. For example, our understanding of "You are the salt of the earth," does not benefit from naming every conceivable quality and use of salt or of the word "salt." Jesus is not talking about an elderly sailor (and old salt). We need to be careful to read out from the text (exegesis) what it says and means and not read into the text (eisegesis) ideas that are not there. So, how is the image actually used in the passage?
5. **Ask questions of the passage.** What is its main message, point, exhortation, challenge, or whatever it offers? What contrasts are there? What points touch your own life or the life of society? What does the passage say about God? About life? About our rightful humanity? About the nature of faith? About our relations with other people? What hope does it offer? Is it more a comfort or a challenge? How? Different passages raise different questions.
6. **Make connections between the passage and your own life.**
7. **Make a prayer in response to the passage.**

This procedure is not offered as the one and only approach to studying a passage of the Bible. It is meant more to suggest than to prescribe.

It is also important to remember that one is never done with a passage of the Bible. The questions raised about life do not receive definitive, once-for-all-time answers, because the Bible is about life, and life is to be lived in relationship, not spelled out and finished.

Besides, your own context (your situation in life) keeps changing. So, a passage of the Bible may speak God's truth to you differently today than ten or twenty years ago when your situation was different and you were different.