

THE  
DISCIPLESHIP  
PLACE

How to Study the Bible



**SESSION 6**  
Application

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# Application: An Overview

## SESSION OVERVIEW

**Bridging Two Worlds**

**Kinds of Application**

**Speak It and Write It**

**Whose Meaning?**

**Testing Truth**

**The Holy Spirit and Application**

**Conclusion**

**Application**

**Exam – Session 6**

**Discussion Guide for Mentor and Participant**

## LEARNER OBJECTIVES

At the end of this session, you should be able to:

- explain why application is important for studying Scripture
- describe how we can bridge the world of the Bible to our world
- list different kinds of applications we might make
- explain the difference between our meaning and the Bible's meaning
- test the validity of our application

## Application: An Overview

### INTRODUCTION

The final step in effective Bible study is application. This happens when the truth of Scripture changes our lives. Ultimately this is where we hoped our study might lead. It answers the all-important question of “so what?”

Suppose a chef prepares a wonderful feast, but no one ever eats it. We might wonder about the value of his work. The true worth of food is that it nourishes the body. Food strengthens a person and causes growth. Regardless of how good food might look, smell, or taste, if it is not consumed, it cannot do its job.

Scripture is food for our souls. It nourishes life with God, building strength within and growing our relationship with God. If we only pray over, observe, and explore Scripture but never apply it in our lives, we will grow weak. We might spend hours preparing a “feast” of wonderful insights into God’s Word; but if we do not consume it, we will miss the ultimate reward of Bible study.

Jesus promised, “Whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:19). So James admonished early Christians, “Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says” (James 1:22). Further, he maintained, “Whoever looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues in it – not forgetting what they have heard, but doing it – they will be blessed in what they do” (James 1:25). We must apply the truths of Scripture to our lives.

## BRIDGING TWO WORLDS

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### NOTES

The task of application involves bridging our world with the world of the Bible. These are very different worlds in many ways, separated by time and culture. But they are also much the same in other ways. People did not drive cars, fly in airplanes, or work on computers in the Bible. But they do experience love, hope, and joy as well as loss, despair, and sorrow. Most importantly they experience God. In application we look for ways the two worlds are similar.

During the exploration step of Bible study, we try to discover the message of a passage for its original readers. In the application step, we want to discover the message of a passage for contemporary readers. In order to do this well, we must look for parallels in circumstances as well as principles that can transfer from one world to another.

Parallels between our world and the biblical world might occur in a number of ways. Paul's experience of prison in Rome may not match life for many of us. But some can identify with his feelings of confinement and his temptation to despair about his situation in life. So when he testifies to being content in his circumstance in Philippians 4:11-12, we might ask what advice he could offer that would apply to our lives today.

Fortunately, Paul lays down principles for finding contentment in difficult circumstances rather than specifics about how to engage guards or work the Roman prison system to his advantage. He admonishes those to whom he writes to focus upon "whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, (and) whatever is admirable" (Philippians 4:8). Any person anywhere can apply this principle of positive thinking at any time. So both parallels and principles make these words a relevant message for people today.

## KINDS OF APPLICATION

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### NOTES

Scripture can apply to our lives in several different ways. It can inform and encourage us as well as challenge and rebuke us. It might call us to action and to speak up, but it might also direct us to wait and be silent. Scripture gives us specific things to do as well as great mysteries to ponder. It might leave us speechless, but it can also give us words to speak.

The Apostle Paul told Timothy that Scripture “is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:16). As Paul suggests, Scripture may teach us a truth that we need to believe. It might also point out a sin that needs to be confessed or an attitude or behavior that needs changing. It could also give us an example of good living that we can follow. Ultimately, Scripture will show us how to be a “servant of God.” It will tell us to put things into our lives as well as take things out in order to be “equipped for every good work.”

In Psalm 19 the psalmist lists a number of benefits we experience when we apply God’s Word to life. These include: “refreshing the soul,” “giving joy to the heart,” and “giving light to the eyes” (vv. 7-8). Such rewards indicate that Scripture gives us promises to claim as well as things for which to thank God. When we apply God’s promises to our circumstances, our souls are refreshed. So also, when we thank God in the midst of our circumstances, our hearts experience joy and our eyes see the hope we have in God.

## SPEAK IT AND WRITE IT

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### NOTES

Two practices help assure that we will apply Scripture to life: speaking it and writing it. Dawson Troutman, the founder of Navigators, used to say, “Thoughts disentangle themselves when they pass through the lips and fingertips.” This is very true. As we encounter life-changing truths in the Bible, we will want to put them into our own words, either audibly or in writing.

Many people find journaling during Bible study helpful. They write down those things that God seems to say to them through His words. Sometimes these can be in the form of prayers to God. After reading the admonition to “be quick to listen” and “slow to speak” in James 1:19, we might write a prayer asking the Lord to prompt us to do that today. The nice thing about a journal is that no one else will read it. We can express our thoughts freely without worrying about spelling, punctuation or legibility. No teacher will check it. The important thing is that we write what God has put on our hearts.

We might also share with someone else what Scripture has said to us. A partner in Bible study will encourage us to apply the truth of Scripture. If the sharing is mutual, that is even better. As we listen to the truths a friend has discovered in Scripture and then share our insights, we will build each other up in the faith. Also, once we have told another person what we are hearing in God’s Word, we will be more likely to follow through. This could be done with a small group of friends as well as one other person.

One other way to speak the truth of Scripture is to make the prayers of the Bible our prayers. We can personalize the words of Psalm 51, for example, and make it our own prayer of confession and repentance to God. On another occasion, we can speak the words of Psalm 30 as an affirmation of our faith. Of course, Jesus instructed all His disciples to pray “The Lord’s Prayer” in Matthew 6:9-13. As we pray these words from our hearts, we are applying them to our lives.

## WHOSE MEANING?

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### NOTES

We should be alert to a pitfall in making applications. Sometimes people grasp at a message that fits their circumstances more than it fits the text. Situations in life can cause people to jump on ideas that are often cursory or not even relevant to the point of a Bible passage. For example, athletes may be inspired by God's command, "Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past" (Isaiah 43:18). They may hear it as a message to leave past defeats behind and try harder in the future. That passage, however, actually admonishes God's people to trust in God's ultimate victory in this world and wait for it. Hope for the future rests on what God will do, not so much what his people will do.

Some scholars, in fact, have suggested that whatever meaning a reader gets from a text is okay. They say that a text has no meaning until a reader finds a message in it. But do we want to order our lives according to a message that we have created or according to one that the Bible intended to convey? The latter seems more needed for most of us. We may have some good ideas about life, but most of us need to hear what the Creator of life has to say about it through His Word.

Therefore, we may not want to ask, "What does the Bible mean to me?" That could lead us to think that we give our own subjective meaning to the text. Rather we should ask, "How does the message of the Bible apply to my life?" That clarifies that the Bible controls the message, not us.



## TESTING TRUTH



### NOTES

This is why we will want to test the validity of a truth we seek to apply to life. First, we will want to be sure it actually comes out of the Bible passage itself. The exploration step of our study should help ensure this connection. If we try to hear the message given to an original audience, then we lessen the risk of reading our own ideas into the passage.

We can also test the validity of a truth by finding other Bible passages that support it. An idea that no other part of the Bible mentions is suspect. The Bible has a way of reinforcing important ideas in several places. This is an element of the unity of Scripture. So we will want to read Scripture in light of other Scripture. Many modern translations include notes that interconnect Bible passages. These prove helpful in seeing the same truth repeated in other passages.

Also, we will want to submit the truth of a Bible passage to the threefold test of reason, experience, and tradition. The test of reason simply asks if the truth we perceive makes sense. Is it reasonable? Of course, with God things may not always seem to make sense from a human standpoint. But we might ask, if God is truly God in this world, could this be a reasonable action or thought?

The test of experience asks how a truth works in real life. This test often gets immediate results since life has a way of teaching us about reality. Once we apply an idea in the trenches of life, we find out pretty quickly if it is actually valid. For example, some people think that Paul admonishes us to believe that everything will go smoothly for those who trust God. After all, he writes, "...in all things God works for the good of those who love him" (Romans 8:28). But real life experience tells us that life is not always good for God's people. They face many challenges. What they do experience though is God working to transform difficult circumstances into something that is good.

The final test, the test of tradition, simply asks how other Christians have understood the truth of a passage. The way in which Christians throughout history have applied a text provides helpful guidance for us today. We can turn to a trusted saint of the church and ask how they have applied the truth of a passage. This could be someone we know or Christians who have left us their thoughts in a book. Their wisdom will be worth hearing, for they have been there before us.

## THE HOLY SPIRIT AND APPLICATION

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### NOTES

We must never forget that we have supernatural help for applying Scripture to life. The Spirit of God works in us to guide our understanding and application of the Bible. Jesus promised it would be so. He told His disciples, “But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth” (John 16:13).

The application step is one of those moments in our study of Scripture when we will want to pray. We can simply utter the words suggested in Session Three: “Lord, help me apply your truth to my life this day.” If we keep our hearts open, we can be sure this prayer will be answered.

## CONCLUSION

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### NOTES

Application is the step in our study of Scripture that makes all the hard work worthwhile. It allows us to grow in our relationship with God and become the people He desires us to be and that we desire to be. When we apply His Word to our lives, we begin to understand why the psalmist said, “How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth” (Psalm 119:103).

## APPLICATION

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NOTES

1. Look at the learner objectives for this session. Can you:
  - explain why application is important for studying Scripture?
  - describe how we can bridge the world of the Bible to our world?
  - list different kinds of applications we might make?
  - explain the difference between our meaning and the Bible's meaning?
  - test the validity of our application?
2. Read Psalm 119:97-104 and reflect on how the psalmist must have applied the word of God in his life.

## EXAM - SESSION 6



### NOTES

1. Why is application so important for studying Scripture?
  - A. It nourishes life with God.
  - B. It changes us into the people God created us to be.
  - C. It obeys Jesus' command to do and not just listen to God's Word.
  - D. all of these
2. A person can build bridges between our world and the biblical world by \_\_\_\_\_.
  - A. finding parallels
  - B. finding principles that fit any time frame
  - C. both of these
  - D. neither of these
3. Some kinds of applications we might make include \_\_\_\_\_.
  - A. an idea we need to ponder
  - B. a sin or attitude we need to avoid
  - C. a promise that will encourage us
  - D. all of these
4. Two ways to assure that we apply Scripture to life are \_\_\_\_\_.
  - A. pondering it
  - B. writing it
  - C. liking it
  - D. speaking it
  - E. B & D
5. A good way to apply the Bible is to pray the prayers of Scripture.
  - A. True
  - B. False
6. The message of a text that we want to apply in our lives is \_\_\_\_\_.
  - A. whatever it means to me
  - B. whatever the Bible intended it to mean
  - C. whatever someone tells me it means to them
  - D. all of these

 **NOTES**

7. Some ways of validating the truth we seek to apply to life include \_\_\_\_\_.
  - A. finding support in other Scriptures
  - B. considering the reasonableness of the truth
  - C. testing the truth in real life
  - D. listening to what other Christians have said
  - E. all of these
  
8. As we apply Scripture to life, we can rely upon the help of \_\_\_\_\_.
  - A. good intuition
  - B. good luck
  - C. the Holy Spirit
  - D. time
  
9. According to the session writer, application of Bible truth to our lives makes all the hard work of studying Scripture worthwhile.
  - A. True
  - B. False

## DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR MENTOR AND PARTICIPANT

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**NOTES**

Be prepared to discuss the following with your mentor:

1. Why is the skill of application so important for studying the Bible?
2. How can we bridge the gap between our world and the biblical world?
3. What are some ways Scripture can be applied to our lives?
4. What is the difference between the meaning of the Bible for me and the meaning from the Bible that applies to me?
5. How can we test the validity of our applications?
6. How does the Holy Spirit help us apply Scripture?