

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. Through prayer, we ask for God's help as we study.

How to:

1. **Write a prayer** you'll use each time you start your DISO 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. **Commit to praying this prayer every time** you begin this study.

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, looking for** words, phrases, or sentences that evoke a **"huh?"** or **"wow!"** reaction.
 - **"Huh?" reactions indicate you don't clearly see what the word or phrase communicates**—you may need to **investigate** the word, phrase, or verse to ensure you have the proper perspective on them.
 - **"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 it's a topic that speaks to an important incident or experience of yours.

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.

You’ll focus primarily (but not exclusively) on these verses as you complete the remaining steps in this study.

Step Three: Mine Your Treasure

Mining means you’ll dig up several 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 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 God’s perspective on your personal treasure.

2. **Check the study passage for the following four types of emphasis** Bible authors used to highlight important concepts. Consider all of these as you find them, even if they don’t seem related to your personal treasure. Through study, the Holy Spirit may reveal a connection that isn’t obvious. Examine the author’s use of:

- **Repetition** of certain words or phrases.

*If you’re studying a very short passage, **look through the whole chapter** and possibly the whole book 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);

- **the words [not] like or as, as well as more than/ less than and better than/ worse than;** then 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.

- **finally, check whether the author uses contrast** (a discussion of opposites) to explain repeated words or phrases.

- **Lists of similar items** (things, attributes, activities, etc.)

*These may appear in **a single sentence separated with commas or semicolons** or described using **similar sentence construction** over several paragraphs of text.*

- Special statements in the form of **blessings, commands, curses, prayers, promises,** and/ or **warnings.**

3. Narrow your **focus to the action** in the **verse(s) relating to your personal treasure** (the *huh?* or *wow!* you decided to study in *Step Two, Survey*), and **notice any motives or causes** of that action.

To find **causes** or **motives** in the Bible, first look for these key words/ phrases:

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

The above connectors always join an **action** phrase (noun + verb) with the **reason** for that action. In addition, these key words:

For [because] ***since [because]*** ***so [so that]*** ***that [so that]*** ***to [in order to].***

sometimes connect action to a reason. Use this two-step test to determine if the author passage reveals a cause:

1. Read the sentence replacing the original word (***for, since, so, that, or to***) with the bracketed (***because, so that, or in order to***) connector.
2. Does the new sentence make sense in the passage's context? Does it mean the same as the original? If the answer to either question is no, there's no cause/effect relationship there.

With most of these, you'll 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.*

The **action** = *I went to the store*

because

The **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 ***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.*

The **reason** = *I was out of milk*

therefore

The **action** = *I went to the store.*

4. Continue focusing on the **action in the relevant verse(s)** and look for **conditions or methods** that describe **how the action in those verses took place**.
- Does the author **condition** the action on something else happening? In other words, ***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 correctly understand them and their appropriate use.

How to:

1. Start with **literal context** (the text around the study passage). Read the first chapter of the book you’re studying in and at least two or three chapters on either side of the study passage, looking for the following types of writing:
 - Instructions
 - Law
 - Letter
 - Narrative (story)
 - Poetry, and/or
 - Prophecy (prediction of events happening after the information was disclosed)
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. Reread the chapters surrounding the study passage, this time looking for anything related to the personal treasure you identified in Step 2.
If your passage is **narrative**, also notice events leading up to and following the study text.
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 at right** to access introductions¹ to each book in the English Standard Version translation.



¹ https://www.blueletterbible.org/study/intros/esv_intros.cfm.

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

In addition, 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 precisely because they would best understand it. Therefore, **the passage cannot mean to us what it could not have meant to them.***

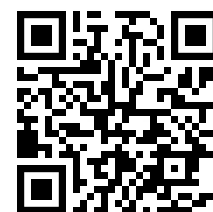
5. God oversaw everything about the Bible, including the author's choice of words. Choose a few of the most important words from the verse(s) containing your personal treasure and examine them using this **original language tool**² by scanning the QR code, right, then using the drop-down menus at the top of the screen to navigate to the appropriate book, chapter, and verse(s). Log what you discover in your study journal.



6. Scripture is the best interpreter of Scripture, so our next task is to consult **cross-references** (other Scripture passages connected to the event(s) or topic(s) identified with your target verses) for the verses. One of the most widely available sources of these references is **The Treasury of Scriptural Knowledge** (TSK), which you can access online³ with the QR code at left. As with the previous tool above, you can 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.



7. And finally, look at **other translations**⁴ of the verses containing your treasure using the code 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/or the Amplified Bible (AMP).

² <https://biblehub.com/lexicon/genesis/1-1.htm>.

³ <https://biblehub.com/tsk/genesis/1-1.htm>.

⁴ <https://biblehub.com/genesis/1-1.htm>.

- **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.
8. After all this, review what you've learned from the literal and historical context, your original language information, other parts of the Bible, and other translations. When you're comfortable that you understand your personal treasure as the author and his audience did, you're ready to take the last step in this process.

Step Five: Align with Your Treasure

The only way to really learn biblical wisdom is to practice it, and God's Word gives us specific instructions on how to do 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?
3. Which word, phrase, or sentence from the study provides divine **correction** in your situation?
4. How will you **practice** the truth you discovered in this study?

If you have questions working through this process, email me at jen@jencason.com or scan the code at right⁵ to message me from my website. While you're there, check out my current online study blog.

May God bless you as you dig into Scripture yourself!



⁵ <https://www.jencason.com/contact-jen/>.