

Introduction

The Sermon on the Mount is one of the most transformative teachings in history. But its beauty is easily lost if we rush through it or filter it through modern assumptions. That's why we will approach it slowly, carefully, and prayerfully using a method that helps us not just to hear what Jesus said, but to understand, apply, and share it.

To help with this, we will be using a method of study that is clear, practical, and centered on Scripture itself. This approach is commonly called Inductive Bible Study. Whether you're studying this for the first time or coming back to it with fresh eyes, the approach below will guide you through Jesus' teaching with purpose and insight.

What Is Inductive Reasoning?

Inductive reasoning starts with specific observations and uses them to reach a general conclusion.

You already use inductive reasoning all the time—probably without even realizing it. It's how we naturally make sense of the world: by noticing patterns and drawing conclusions from repeated experiences.

For example:

- **First time:** I ate strawberries, and my lips swelled.
- **Second time:** I ate strawberries, and my lips swelled again.
- **Third time:** Same result.
- **Additional info:** Swollen lips can be a sign of an allergy.
- **Conclusion:** I'm probably allergic to strawberries.

You didn't need to be a doctor—you just paid attention and noticed a consistent pattern. That's inductive thinking.

The same kind of reasoning applies to studying Scripture. When we read a passage and carefully observe repeated themes, logical flow, contrasts, and conclusions, we begin to understand the bigger message God is communicating. **You already have the skill—you just need to apply it to God's Word.**

Even Jesus expected His listeners to observe, connect, and conclude.

In **Matthew 6:26**, He said: “Look at the birds of the air: they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them.”

That's an inductive invitation:

- **Observation:** Birds don't plant or harvest.
- **Observation:** God still feeds them.
- **Additional knowledge:** We are more valuable than birds.
- **Conclusion:** God will provide for us, too—so don't worry.

Jesus didn't give the conclusion first—He let His listeners discover it. That's inductive reasoning.

If we can observe birds and trust God's care, surely we can observe a Bible passage and trust its message.

What Is Inductive Bible Study?

Inductive Bible study means we begin with the Bible itself—not someone's opinions or commentaries—and let it speak on its own terms. (e.g., Since God gave us His Word in the form of books, we study it one book at a time.)

This method helps us:

- Understand the structure of each book (its divisions and themes).
- Recognize what kind of writing it is (genre): law, story, poetry, prophecy, gospel, or letter.
- Notice time, place, and key people/events.

You don't need outside sources to study the Bible inductively—but historical or cultural context can sometimes help.

Why Inductive Study Matters

Our goal in Bible study is **exegesis**—to draw out the intended meaning from the text. The opposite of this is **eisegesis**, where someone reads their own opinions or traditions into the text. Inductive study is the method that helps us stay grounded in what God actually says, not what we assume He says.

Many people today rely on an **intuitive** or "feels-right" approach to the Bible:

- It's based on instinct or emotion: "This verse speaks to me..."
- It's unsystematic and inconsistent.
- It's shaped more by personal experience or mood than by the text.
- It often skips over historical and literary context.

The result? People walk away with very different—and often conflicting—interpretations of the same passage. The Bible itself, however, warns against this kind of subjective interpretation.

Consider **2 Peter 1:20–21**: "No prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation... but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God." While this refers directly to how Scripture originated, the principle holds for how we interpret it. We should not approach Scripture based on instinct or opinion—but by listening carefully to what God has spoken.

Paul reminds us of the power of Scripture in **2 Timothy 3:16–17**. Two things are said about Scripture:

- It is **inspired**—literally "God-breathed." These are God's own words.
- It is **profitable**—it benefits and equips us for spiritual life.

Paul then lists what Scripture is profitable for:

- **Doctrine** – Teaching the truth about salvation, the church, and God's will.
- **Reproof** – Warning us about error or sin.
- **Correction** – Showing us how to get back on track when we've strayed.

- **Instruction in righteousness** – Guiding us like a child being trained in how to live rightly.

Then in verse 17, Paul gives a second list describing what Scripture produces in a believer:

- The **man of God** becomes **complete** – spiritually whole and mature.
- He is **thoroughly equipped** – fully supplied with everything needed.

Finally, Paul says Scripture equips us **for every good work**—meaning that all spiritual activity, service, and obedience are shaped and guided by what Scripture teaches.

We want to give more than just lip service to the Bible. Many denominations and groups claim to follow God’s Word, yet their beliefs and practices often differ greatly from one another. There are hundreds of conflicting doctrines—each one supposedly based on the Bible. One scholar says this, another says that.

But 1 Corinthians 14:33 reminds us that “God is not the author of confusion.” These contradictory interpretations are not grounded in God’s Word but in human assumptions and careless study.

We can avoid these errors by staying close to the text. When we study Scripture with careful observation, we can be confident that our beliefs and practices are truly rooted in God’s Word—not in man-made traditions or opinions.

Inductive study helps us move from saying, “I think this passage is about...” to declaring, “This is what the passage says.” It slows us down, helps us listen carefully, and trains us to seek God’s truth rather than our own impressions.

This is why inductive study matters. It keeps us grounded in God’s voice, equips us to live faithfully, and honors His Word by handling it with reverence and care.

In short:

- The intuitive approach is shallow, fast, and often wrong.
- Inductive study is slow, careful, and faithful to the truth.
- One honors emotion. The other honors God.

Inductive study matters because it helps us:

- Stay anchored in truth
- Handle Scripture with reverence
- Live lives shaped by what God has *actually* said—that is the only foundation strong enough to build your faith on.

The Ezra 7:10 Method

This approach isn’t new—it’s biblical. Long before Jesus taught, Ezra modeled a method we can still follow today: “For Ezra had set his heart to study the Law of the Lord, and to do it and to teach his statutes and rules in Israel.” (Ezra 7:10)

Ezra made deliberate, firm goals for his life. He prepared himself and committed deeply to following them. His method reflects the very heart of inductive study and biblical exegesis:

Ezra's three goals were:

- **To study the Law of the Lord** – The word “study” here means “to seek with care.” Ezra made careful inquiries into God’s law for knowledge, advice, and insight.
- **To practice the Law of the Lord** – He was committed not only to learning the Word but living it.
- **To teach God’s statutes and ordinances** – Ezra didn’t keep the Word to himself. He wanted others to know and live it too.

We use these goals to shape the four steps of inductive Bible study:

- **Study** → Observation and Interpretation
- **Practice** → Application
- **Teach** → Teach It

This method is more than mere study, it is a lifestyle of devotion and obedience rooted in God’s Word.

Step 1: Observation *What does the text say?*

Start with prayer. You’re not just studying—you’re listening to God. Ask Him to help you see what He wants to reveal through His Word.

Ask the 5 W’s and an H:

- **Who?** – Who is speaking? Who is being addressed? Who are the main people or groups involved?
- **What?** – What is being said, done, commanded, or taught?
- **When?** – When is this taking place? Are there time indicators?
- **Where?** – Are any locations, settings, or regions mentioned?
- **Why?** – Is a reason or purpose given for what’s happening or being said?
- **How?** – How is the command fulfilled? How does the author describe the action or concept?

Learn the Importance of Words

The Bible teaches that each word is inspired by God (2 Timothy 3:16). God didn’t just give general ideas—He gave specific words.

- **Words matter.** God’s communication is precise and trustworthy.
- **Old Testament:** God gave prophets words to speak and record (Exodus 34:27; Deuteronomy 5:22).
- **New Testament:** Jesus promised the Holy Spirit would guide the apostles in teaching (John 14:26), and Peter affirmed their words were God’s (2 Peter 3:2).
- **Paul said** in 1 Corinthians 2:13 that the apostles used “words taught by the Spirit.”

To honor this, we can:

- Use **lexicons** to understand the original language when needed.
- Look for how a word is used across different books (i.e., its semantic range). Remember a word doesn’t necessarily have all possible meanings in every context.
- Study the **context**—immediate and broader—so we interpret words accurately.
- Use **dependable translations** that reflect the original wording as clearly as possible.

- In this study, we will mostly be making observations that can be seen directly from the English translation. No other tools like lexicons will be needed although you may find them helpful.

Mark what you find:

- **Key words or repeated phrases** – Words that stand out or appear often show the author’s emphasis.
- **Lists** – These can clarify meaning (e.g., traits of the righteous, duties of a leader, attributes of God).
- **Contrasts and comparisons** – These sharpen the author’s message by showing opposites (light/darkness, pride/humility).
- **Time references** – Words like “then,” “after that,” “now,” or “until” give sequence and timing.
- **Geographical locations** – Knowing where something takes place can give insight or context.
- **Conclusion words** – Words like “therefore,” “so,” or “for this reason” often show a shift from teaching to action or summary.

Try to Find the Main Idea:

Step back and ask:

- What is the author emphasizing in this section?
- Is there a key verse or idea that everything else supports?
- What thought connects the pieces together?

In this study, there will be a series of questions and exercises to help you learn to observe the text. One of the most common exercises will be to make at least one observation about each verse (in reality it would be possible to make hundreds of observations about each verse).

Here is an example of some observations for Matthew 6:19, one for each word/phrase of the passage:

- Do—This has to do with our actions, it is not about what we believe, but about what we practice. It is the start of a command.
- Not—This tells us the command is negative. There is something we need to avoid doing.
- Lay up/store—This has to do with saving or preparing for the future
- for yourselves—Has to do with an action that we do for ourselves and for our benefit.
- treasures—this is what we are storing or laying up.
- on earth—this is where we are not to store treasures
- where—this is telling us about the earth
- moth and rust—these are things that aren’t good
- destroy—this is what the moths and rust will do to what is stored on earth
- and—there is more that is to be said about what happens to our stuff on earth
- where—talking about what is going to happen to our stuff on earth again.
- thieves—there are dishonest people in this world that will affect our treasures on earth
- break in and steal—this is what the thieves are going to do to our earthly treasures

Observation Walkthrough – Romans 12:1–2

Romans 12:1–2

“I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.”

Conclusion Word: “Therefore” Paul is drawing a conclusion from what has been said before. In this case the therefore refers to all of Romans 1–11 and marks a move from the doctrinal section to the application of the sections. This is what we are supposed to do knowing all the information in the first eleven chapters.

Who? Paul is writing to “brothers”—fellow believers.

What? He urges them to present their bodies and to be transformed. Words like urge, beseech, beg, and implore are petition verbs. This is one of the ways to add emphasis. They are used to highlight matters of special importance.

When? Ongoing action is implied (present tense).

Where? No specific location is mentioned.

Why? Because of the mercies of God.

How? By presenting themselves and renewing their minds.

Lists:

- Description of the sacrifice: living, holy, acceptable
- Qualities of God’s will: good, acceptable, perfect

Contrasts: conform vs. transform, also an implied contrast between a living sacrifice and a dead sacrifice

Time Words: implied in “present,” “renewal” (ongoing)

Main Idea (from observation only): In light of God's mercy, believers are called to present themselves to God and be transformed in how they think and live.

Step 2: Interpretation *What does it mean?*

Now that you’ve gathered the facts from the text, it’s time to understand what those facts mean. This is where we move from *seeing the pieces* to *grasping the picture*. It’s not about what we want the passage to say—but about what the author (and ultimately, the Holy Spirit) *intended* it to communicate. Interpretation is drawing out the true meaning already present in the text.

Key Guidelines for Interpretation

- **Come to the text with a blank page**

We all carry assumptions with us—things we’ve heard from parents, preachers, traditions, or even personal preferences. That doesn’t make those things wrong, but it means we need to lay them aside when we come to the Bible.

Ask yourself: “*What if what I’ve always heard is not what this passage really says?*”

That’s the mindset of an honest Bible student.

- **Interpretation is based on the observations you made**

Good interpretation begins with careful observation. If you skip observation or jump to conclusions, your interpretation may miss the point entirely. Go back to what the text actually says—your interpretation must grow out of the details you saw in Step 1.

- **Context is key**

Never read a verse in isolation. Meaning flows from the surrounding paragraph, chapter, and even the entire book.

Ask: What came before this verse? What comes after? What problem is being addressed? Who's being spoken to?

- **Let Scripture explain Scripture**

The Bible is unified. If one passage seems confusing, look at other passages that speak clearly about the same subject.

For example, if you're interpreting Romans 10:13 ("Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved"), you should also look at Acts 22:16 and Romans 6:3–4 to see how Paul talks about "calling" and "being saved" elsewhere.

- **Don't build doctrine on unclear verses**

Some verses are harder to interpret than others. Always interpret difficult passages in light of clear ones. **2 Peter 3:16** warns that some things in Paul's letters are "hard to understand," and the ignorant twist them.

- **Read plainly unless clearly symbolic**

Don't over-complicate what is meant to be understood plainly. If the text sounds literal and there's no strong reason to treat it as a metaphor, read it at face value.

- **Pay attention to genre**

A proverb is not a promise. A poem uses imagery. A historical narrative records what happened, not necessarily what should happen.

Interpret each text according to its literary type. For instance, Revelation and Psalms use rich symbolism, while Romans and Galatians focus on doctrinal teaching. Examples of different genres:

- Law (Torah): Reveals God's covenant and commands
- Narrative: Tells what happened, not always what *should* happen
- Poetry: Uses imagery, emotion, and repetition
- Prophecy: Calls to repentance; often symbolic
- Gospel: Biographical, focused on Jesus' life and teachings
- Epistle: Instructional letters to churches or individuals

Note: The genre of the Sermon on the Mount is a **discourse** which we will talk about later in this introduction.

- **Stick to the author's intent**

This is the heart of interpretation: *What did the original author mean to say to his original audience?*

If your interpretation would not have made sense to the first readers, then it's probably off track.

We're not looking for hidden codes or mystical insights—we're seeking the plain, intended message of God's Word. That takes humility, effort, and a willingness to let Scripture shape us.

“The unfolding of your words gives light; it imparts understanding to the simple.”
—Psalm 119:130

Let God’s Word speak—and then listen carefully.

Interpretation Walkthrough – Romans 12:1–2

Context:

- The “**therefore**” points back to **Romans 1–11**, where Paul lays out the gospel—human sin, justification by faith, life in the Spirit, and God’s mercy toward Jew and Gentile alike.
- This is a **turning point** in the letter—from doctrine to application. The gospel truths now call for gospel living.
- Paul is not introducing new theology here—he is showing what faithful response to the gospel looks like.

What Does It Mean?

- Paul is **urging believers** to respond to God’s mercy with a **total life commitment**.
- True worship is not confined to a church building—it is the **daily offering of self** in holiness.
- Believers must **resist cultural pressures** and instead allow God to **reshape their thinking**.
- This renewal results in spiritual clarity—believers grow in knowing and doing **God’s will**.

Key Themes in the Book of Romans Connected Here:

- **Justification leads to sanctification** (Rom. 5–8): What God has done in saving us now transforms how we live.
- **Living by the Spirit** (Rom. 8): Renewal and transformation come through the Spirit’s work, not legalism.
- **Response to grace** (Rom. 6): Grace is not a license to sin but a call to righteousness.

Step 3: Application *What does it mean for my life?*

When you know what the text says (Observation) and what it means (Interpretation), you’re ready for Application—where Scripture meets real life. This is where the truth of God’s Word changes our thinking, our actions, and our character.

Ask these questions:

- What does God want me to do?
- What do I need to change?
- What does this teach me about God or myself?
- How can I live this out today?
- What next step can I take in obedience?

Application is not about vague inspiration—it’s about specific transformation. It could lead to:

- A shift in your attitude or perspective
- A change in your habits or relationships

- A step of faith you need to take
- A truth you need to share with someone else

Remember **2 Timothy 3:16–17**: "All Scripture is breathed out by God and is profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness..."

Each of these outcomes leads to godly living. Scripture isn't meant to sit in your notebook—it's meant to shape your daily walk.

Suggested Practices for Application:

- Write down one concrete thing you will do differently this week based on what you learned.
- Memorize a verse from your study and meditate on it daily.
- Share your application point with a trusted friend or mentor for accountability.
- Pray about what you've read and ask for strength to live it out.

Inductive Bible study helps you move from reading the Word to **living the Word**—by seeing the text, understanding its meaning, and letting it transform your life.

Application Walkthrough – Romans 12:1–2

What does God want me to do?

- To **offer my body**—my time, energy, thoughts, actions—as a **living, ongoing act of worship** to God.
- To **resist being shaped** by the world's values, habits, and thinking.
- To pursue **transformation** from the inside out by **renewing my mind**—filling it with God's Word and truth.
- To actively seek and **approve of God's will** in my daily decisions and long-term direction.

What do I need to change?

- Am I offering my whole life to God—or just giving Him a part of me?
- Have I allowed culture, media, or comfort to shape my thinking more than God's Word?
- Do I regularly make time for renewal through prayer, Scripture, and reflection?
- Is my worship limited to Sunday—or is it a **daily act** of surrender and obedience?

What does this teach me about God or myself?

- God desires **full devotion**, not half-hearted religion.
- He doesn't force transformation—He invites it, and provides the **means through mercy and renewal**.
- God's will is **not mysterious or burdensome**—it is good, acceptable, and perfect.
- I need to be an **active participant** in the renewal of my mind by seeking what is true.

How can I live this?

- Start my morning by **presenting myself to God** in prayer: "Lord, today I'm Yours."
- Choose one area of life (speech, attitude, time use) where I will **consciously resist conformity** and pursue transformation.

- Read or meditate on a **passage of Scripture** that renews my thinking.
- Pause before decisions to ask, “Does this align with God’s will? Does it reflect His mercy?”

Suggested Activity – A Living Sacrifice List

Each day this week, choose one way to offer part of yourself to God.

Examples:

- My hands → Serve someone with kindness.
- My mouth → Speak truth or encouragement.
- My mind → Replace a negative thought with scripture.
- My eyes → Look for someone in need.
- My time → Set aside 10 minutes to pray or read.

At the end of the week, reflect:

“How did giving myself to God in these little ways shape my thoughts and attitude?”

Step 4: Teach It *What can I share with others?*

A large part of growing as a disciple is helping others grow too. When God’s Word begins to shape your life, it’s natural to want to pass it on—especially to those closest to you.

This doesn’t require a classroom or a podium. You can teach through everyday conversations, family devotions, text messages of encouragement, or coffee shop chats. When someone shares a struggle or question, you can respond with insights from what you’ve studied.

Ask:

- How would I explain this truth to a child or teenager?
- How can I live this in front of my friends and family so they see it in action?
- What’s one question I could ask someone to spark a deeper conversation about this passage?

Keep your sharing tied to the text:

- What does the passage say?
- What does it mean?
- How can we live it out together?

Use your study notes, key words, and big themes to keep it clear and grounded. Teaching not only helps others—it deepens your own understanding and helps God’s Word dwell richly in your heart.

Suggested Practice — Pass It On:

- Choose one verse or idea from your study to share with a friend or family member this week. Don’t preach—just share what stood out and why.

- If someone asks a spiritual question, gently connect it to something you've been studying.
- Model what you've learned in your tone, attitude, and actions—sometimes the best teaching is how we live.

You don't need to be a scholar—just a student of God's Word who's willing to share the truth with love and clarity.

Paul gives a charge in **2 Timothy 2:2**:

"What you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also."

We don't just learn for ourselves—we prepare to pass it on.

This is the heart of inductive Bible study: **Learn it. Live it. Share it.**

Teach It – Romans 12:1–2

By teaching a child or someone I am mentoring

I might start with a question: "How do we respond to God's kindness?"

Then explain:

"Romans 12:1–2 says the way we serve God isn't just going to church—it's giving our lives to God every day. That means what we do with our bodies, what we think about, and how we live all matter to God."

Use a simple image: "**Living sacrifice**" means **we stay on the altar**—we give ourselves to God and don't take it back when it's hard.

Through modeling the principles in my life

- **Presenting my body:** I use my energy, time, and choices to serve others and honor God.
- **Renewing my mind:** I filter what I watch, listen to, and think about based on what helps me think more like Christ.
- **Avoiding conformity:** I resist doing things just because "everyone else is"—I ask what God wants first.

Through discussions—One question to ask someone: "What's one area of your life you haven't really surrendered to God yet?" Follow up: "What's one small step you could take to offer that part of yourself to Him this week?"

A Note On the Genre: Understanding Biblical Discourses

The Sermon on the Mount is not a letter, a parable, or a collection of laws—it is a **discourse**, a sustained oral teaching delivered by Jesus to a real audience in a real moment (cf. Matthew 5:1–2). Understanding how biblical discourses work will help you study and apply Jesus' words more effectively.

What Is a Discourse?

A **discourse** is a structured public teaching. In Scripture, discourses are often:

- **Oral in origin**—meant to be heard, not read silently
- **Built on memorable structure**—parallelism, contrast, repetition, and summary
- **Meant to shape action**—they don't just inform, they call people to respond

Biblical discourses appear in places like Moses' farewell in *Deuteronomy*, Peter's sermon in *Acts 2*, and most famously, Jesus' teachings in *Matthew 5–7, Matthew 13, John 14–17*, and elsewhere.

How Jesus Teaches

Jesus' discourses are rich in:

- **Thematic movement** – He weaves recurring ideas (like righteousness, reward, hypocrisy, and the kingdom) across different illustrations and teachings.
- **Verbal artistry** – Phrases like “You have heard... but I say to you...” or “When you pray...” repeat intentionally to create rhythm and memory anchors.
- **Moral confrontation** – Jesus doesn't merely teach doctrines; He calls people to **action** and **decision** (cf. Matthew 7:24–27).

To study Jesus' words well, we must slow down, look for patterns, and resist treating each verse like a standalone proverb. Instead, ask how each section fits into the **flow of the sermon**.

How to Study a Discourse

When studying a biblical discourse like this one:

- Read or **listen** to it in one sitting. Try to imagine yourself in the original audience.
- Trace **progression**: How do the teachings build on or respond to each other?
- Look for **bookends** and repetition: How does Jesus return to key themes?
- Identify **calls to action**: What response does Jesus expect from His hearers?
- Use **context**: What came before and after this teaching? Why does it matter?

As we study the Sermon on the Mount, we are not just reading ancient wisdom—we are **sitting at Jesus' feet**. Let's listen as His first disciples did: not to admire, but to obey.

Conclusion: Listening to the Word

Inductive Bible study is more than a method—it's a mindset. It invites us to slow down, observe carefully, and let God's Word speak on its own terms. Instead of forcing our ideas into the text, we listen to what the Spirit has revealed through Scripture.

This approach requires humility, effort, and discipline. But the reward is deep: clarity in what we believe, confidence in how we live, and conviction in what we share. As Ezra modeled, we study the Word, we practice it, and we teach it to others.

In a world filled with noise, assumptions, and contradictions, inductive study anchors us in the unchanging voice of God. It guards us against error, equips us for every good work, and draws us closer to the heart of the One who speaks.

Let's be people who handle the Word not just with curiosity—but with reverence. Let's listen well. And let's live what we learn.

How to Use These Lessons: A Note on Placement

Lessons 12 & 13 — Getting the Big Picture are designed to give you a full view of the Sermon on the Mount—either **at the beginning** or **at the end** of your study.

You can use them in one of two ways:

- **Option 1: Use at the Beginning (Recommended for Most Groups)**

Starting here allows you to get a sense of the whole sermon before diving into the details. It's like unfolding a map before taking a journey. You'll trace the major themes, structure, and purpose of Jesus' message, which can help you better understand and apply each section as you go.

- **Option 2: Use at the End (Ideal for Reflection and Review)**

Placing these lessons last offers a big-picture review of everything you've learned. It can help reinforce key ideas, connect loose threads, and prepare you to teach or share what you've studied with others.

Either approach is valid—feel free to choose what works best for your group or personal study. The goal is the same: to hear Jesus clearly, follow Him fully, and build your life on the solid rock of His Word (Matthew 7:24–25).