



Rooted in Scripture - Pointing to Jesus

BIBLE STUDY METHODS

HEAR

Bible Study Method

The Short Answer

H - HIGHLIGHT - What stands out in the passage?

E - EXPLAIN - What does the passage mean in its biblical context?

A - APPLY - How should this truth affect belief, attitudes, priorities, or actions?

R - RESPOND - What faithful response should follow?

HEAR is a simple four-step approach for slowing down, understanding Scripture, and responding faithfully. It is especially useful for personal Bible reading and journaling. But the order matters: do not move from what stands out to what it means for life until the passage has first been understood in context.

Psalm 119:18 · James 1:22-25 · 2 Timothy 3:16-17

Opening Memory Anchor

Highlight what Scripture says.

Explain what it means.

Apply its truth.

Respond faithfully.

PART ONE

BEGINNER GUIDE

1. WHAT IS THE HEAR BIBLE STUDY METHOD?

HEAR stands for **H - HIGHLIGHT, E - EXPLAIN, A - APPLY, R - RESPOND**. The method is commonly associated with the HEAR journaling approach taught by Robby Gallaty and Replicate Ministries. Its strength is simplicity. A Bible, notebook, and willingness to slow down are enough to begin. Read a manageable passage carefully - preferably more than once - then work through the four HEAR questions. The goal is not an impressive journal entry. The goal is to understand and respond faithfully to God's Word.

2. WHAT ROLE DO PRAYER AND THE HOLY SPIRIT HAVE?

Bible study is more than an intellectual exercise. Christians depend upon the Holy Spirit while reading Scripture. Before reading, pray for understanding. Psalm 119:18 provides a simple model: "Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of your law." **READ: John 16:13; 1 Corinthians 2:12-14.**

Christians often call the Spirit's help in understanding Scripture "illumination." Illumination does not mean receiving new Scripture. Scripture is inspired by God. **READ: 2 Timothy 3:16-17.** The Holy Spirit helps believers understand, receive, remember, and respond to the Word God has already given. A sincere thought, feeling, or impression should never be treated as equal to Scripture simply because it occurred during prayer or Bible reading. Prayer does not replace careful study.

Memory Anchor

**Pray for understanding.
Then test understanding by Scripture.**

3. H - WHAT SHOULD BE HIGHLIGHTED?

Highlighting means identifying a verse, phrase, repeated word, important statement, or central truth that deserves closer attention. A reader might notice something about God or Jesus; a repeated idea; a command; promise; warning; contrast; question; surprising statement; or a truth central to the passage.

Highlighting does not necessarily mean choosing whichever sentence creates the strongest emotional reaction. Ask: Why does this stand out? How does it relate to the rest of the passage? Would it mean the same thing if the surrounding verses were considered? A highlighted verse remains part of a paragraph, chapter, book, and ultimately the whole biblical story.

Memory Anchor

**Highlight a verse.
Do not isolate it.**

4. E - HOW SHOULD THE PASSAGE BE EXPLAINED?

This is the step that protects HEAR from becoming, "What does this verse mean to me?" Before asking what a passage means personally, ask what it means. Ask: Who wrote this? Who was the original audience? What is happening? What comes before and after? Why was this written? What kind of biblical literature is this? Are important words repeated? What does this reveal about God? How does it fit within the larger message of the book?

Then summarize the meaning in one or two sentences. Consider Philippians 4:13: "I can do all things through him who strengthens me." Read Philippians 4:10-13. Paul is discussing contentment through abundance and need, hunger and plenty. The point is closer to: "Christ strengthens Paul to remain faithful and content through changing circumstances." Context changes the explanation - and therefore the application.

Memory Anchor

Before asking, "What does this mean for life?" ask, "What does this mean?"

5. A - HOW SHOULD SCRIPTURE BE APPLIED?

Once the passage has been understood in context, ask how its truth should affect life. Application might involve something to believe; stop or begin doing; an attitude to change; a sin to confess; a promise to trust; someone to forgive or encourage; a truth to remember; a reason to worship; or a practical act of obedience. **READ: James 1:22-25.** Application must grow from interpretation. A passage cannot faithfully mean something in application that it did not mean in context. Explain comes before Apply for a reason.

Memory Anchor

**Understand first.
Apply second.**

6. R - WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO RESPOND?

Respond is broader than simply writing a prayer. Biblical response can include **PRAY. CONFESS. TRUST. OBEY. FORGIVE. WORSHIP. REMEMBER. ENCOURAGE. SERVE. CHANGE DIRECTION. TAKE A CONCRETE STEP.**

If Scripture reveals God's faithfulness, the response may be trust and worship. If Scripture exposes sin, confession and repentance. If Scripture gives a command, obedience. If it reveals suffering or need, compassion or practical service. If it teaches a difficult truth, the response may simply be to remember it, pray about it, and continue studying. Ask: "Because this passage is true, what faithful response should follow?"

7. WHAT DOES HEAR LOOK LIKE IN PRACTICE?

Consider **James 1:19-25**. James tells believers to be quick to hear, slow to speak, and slow to anger. He warns against merely hearing God's Word without doing what it says and compares such a person to someone who looks in a mirror and immediately forgets what was seen.

H - HIGHLIGHT: James 1:22: Be doers of the word, and not hearers only.

E - EXPLAIN: James warns Christians against hearing biblical truth without allowing it to shape their lives. The mirror illustration strengthens the point.

A - APPLY: Ask whether something Scripture has made clear is being repeatedly heard but not obeyed.

R - RESPOND: Confess known disobedience; ask God for help; choose one concrete step; pray for a heart that welcomes God's Word.

HEAR SUMMARY: Highlight the central truth. Explain it in context. Identify faithful application. Respond with prayer and obedience. The application came from the explanation; the response came from the application.

8. CAN HEAR WORK WITH DIFFERENT TYPES OF PASSAGES?

PSALM 23:1-4 - H: "The LORD is my shepherd." **E:** David uses a shepherd to describe God's care, provision, guidance, and protection. Verse 4 acknowledges the darkest valley. **A:** Security is found in God's presence rather than trouble-free circumstances. **R:** Trust God in a present uncertainty and thank Him for His faithful presence.

MARK 10:46-52 - H: Bartimaeus repeatedly cries out to Jesus. **E:** A blind man recognizes Jesus as "Son of David," calls for mercy, receives sight, and follows Him. **A:** The passage encourages honest dependence upon Jesus and persistent faith that leads to following Christ. **R:** Bring needs honestly before Jesus, trust His mercy, and consider what faithful following looks like.

Different genres may produce different HEAR entries. The method stays simple. The passage determines the content.

9. HOW DOES HEAR DIFFER FROM SOAP AND SPECK?

SOAP: Scripture - Observation - Application - Prayer.

SPECK: Sin - Promise - Example - Command - Knowledge about God.

HEAR: Highlight - Explain - Apply - Respond.

SOAP provides a broad devotional framework. SPECK provides five specific questions. HEAR emphasizes identifying an important part of the passage, understanding it, applying it, and responding. There is substantial overlap. None of these acronyms is inspired. Scripture is inspired. For additional guidance, see **3Nails Study #257 - SOAP Bible Study Method** and **3Nails Study #258 - SPECK Bible Study Method**.

PART TWO

WANT TO GO DEEPER?

INTERMEDIATE

10. WHAT ARE THE MOST COMMON HEAR MISTAKES?

1 - HIGHLIGHTING ONLY COMFORTING VERSES. Scripture also contains correction, warning, lament, judgment, difficult questions, and calls to repentance.

2 - SKIPPING EXPLAIN. Read. Highlight. Explain. Then apply.

3 - TREATING PERSONAL IMPRESSIONS AS AUTHORITATIVE. A thought may be helpful or mistaken. The authority belongs to Scripture.

4 - TURNING EVERY APPLICATION INTO A TO-DO LIST. Sometimes the faithful response is believe, trust, remember, receive comfort, worship, or rest in God's grace.

5 - FORCING A DRAMATIC RESPONSE. Sometimes faithful response is simply, "This is true. Remember it." HEAR should never become a spiritual scorecard.

11. DOES EVERY HIGHLIGHTED VERSE APPLY DIRECTLY TO EVERY CHRISTIAN?

No. A verse may describe a command to ancient Israel, a promise to Abraham, instructions to a particular person, a historical event, a prophetic judgment, a proverb describing a general principle, or a command to Christians generally. Ask: **WHO IS SPEAKING? WHO IS BEING ADDRESSED? WHAT IS THE HISTORICAL SITUATION? WHAT KIND OF LITERATURE IS THIS? HOW DOES THE REST OF SCRIPTURE HELP?**

Genesis 12:1 does not mean every Christian is commanded to move. It does reveal important truths about Abraham's calling, faith, obedience, and God's covenant purposes. Faithful application respects those distinctions.

Memory Anchor

**Every verse is valuable.
Not every instruction is addressed directly to every reader.**

12. HOW DOES HEAR POINT TOWARD JESUS?

The Bible tells one unfolding story that ultimately centers upon God's saving work through Jesus Christ. **READ: Luke 24:25-27, 44-47.** But Jesus should not be artificially inserted into every highlighted verse. Ask whether the passage connects to Jesus through direct prophecy, promise, covenant, sacrifice, priesthood, kingship, temple, Exodus, forgiveness, judgment and salvation, resurrection, new creation, or the Gospel. Sometimes the connection is explicit; sometimes a strong biblical pattern; sometimes the wisest approach is first to understand the immediate context. The goal is to read every passage faithfully within the Bible that ultimately reveals God's redemptive purposes fulfilled in Christ.

13. HOW DOES BIBLICAL GENRE AFFECT HEAR?

NARRATIVE: Description is not automatically instruction. **PSALMS AND POETRY:** Attend to imagery, emotion, parallelism, worship, and lament. **WISDOM:** Proverbs generally describes how wise life ordinarily works rather than unconditional guarantees. **PROPHETS:** Consider historical setting, covenant, judgment, repentance, restoration, and hope. **GOSPELS:** Attend to Jesus' identity, teaching, actions, death, and resurrection. **LETTERS:** Follow the author's argument. **APOCALYPTIC:** Attend to symbolism, Old Testament imagery, original audience, and central theological message without assuming every detail can be interpreted with certainty. Good Bible study allows each biblical book to speak according to its kind of literature.

14. SHOULD HEAR BE DONE ONLY ALONE?

No. HEAR can work in families, one-on-one discipleship, small groups, Bible-reading partnerships, and local-church study settings. Compare what was highlighted, how the passage was explained, what application emerged, and what response followed. Different readers may highlight different verses, but explanations should remain accountable to Scripture.

Pastors, Bible teachers, mature Christians, and the historic Christian community can help readers recognize interpretations they might otherwise miss or challenge conclusions that do not fit the text. No human teacher is infallible. **READ: Acts 17:10-12.** Community is not a replacement for personal Bible reading. Personal Bible reading is not a replacement for the Church.

15. WHAT TOOLS CAN HELP WITH THE EXPLAIN STEP?

Begin with Scripture itself. Helpful tools may include cross-references, a trustworthy study Bible, Bible dictionaries, maps, book introductions, reliable commentaries, and online Bible-study tools. They can clarify historical setting, geography, customs, difficult words, and connections between passages.

But tools remain tools. A study Bible note, commentary, website, or favorite teacher is not Scripture. Compare explanations, notice where Christians disagree, and keep returning to the biblical text. A beginner does not need many resources. One trustworthy study Bible and careful use of cross-references can provide an excellent starting point.

Memory Anchor

**Use tools to understand Scripture.
Do not let tools replace Scripture.**

16. A SIMPLE HEAR WORKSHEET

PASSAGE: _____

PRAY - Ask God for understanding and approach His Word with humility.

READ - Read the entire passage carefully, preferably twice.

H - HIGHLIGHT - What verse, phrase, repeated idea, or central truth deserves closer attention? Why? _____

E - EXPLAIN - What does this passage mean in context? Who wrote it? Who received it? What comes before and after? What kind of literature is it? _____

A - APPLY - Because this passage means what it means, how should its truth affect life? _____

R - RESPOND - What faithful response should follow - prayer, confession, trust, worship, obedience, or a concrete action?

CONTEXT CHECK: Does the application agree with the meaning of the passage? _____

JESUS AND THE BIBLICAL STORY: Is there a legitimate connection to Jesus or the larger story of redemption? _____

17. WHAT SHOULD BE REMEMBERED ABOUT HEAR?

H - HIGHLIGHT what deserves closer attention. **E - EXPLAIN** what the passage means. **A - APPLY** its truth faithfully. **R - RESPOND** to God's Word.

The acronym is not the goal. Ask: What does Scripture say? What does it mean? How should this truth shape life? How should a faithful reader respond? Depend upon the Holy Spirit. Pay attention to context. Learn alongside other Christians. Use helpful tools without allowing them to replace Scripture. Do not confuse personal impressions with biblical meaning, force unsupported application, turn every application into a to-do list, or force Jesus artificially into a passage.

PRAY. READ. HIGHLIGHT. EXPLAIN. APPLY. RESPOND. Then keep returning to Scripture.

Final Memory Anchor

**HEAR is a tool.
Scripture is the authority.**

Pray humbly. Read carefully. Understand faithfully. Apply honestly. Respond obediently.

REVIEW

1. What do the four letters in HEAR represent?
2. What is illumination, and how is it different from inspiration?
3. Why is Explain so important?
4. What is the danger of moving directly from Highlight to Apply?
5. Does every biblical command or promise apply directly to every Christian?
6. What are several ways to Respond?
7. How can genre affect Explain?
8. Why should personal impressions be tested against Scripture?
9. How can pastors, teachers, mature Christians, and the local church strengthen personal Bible study?
10. What is the ultimate goal of HEAR?

SCRIPTURE READING PATH

Practice HEAR with **James 1:19-25 · Psalm 23 · Mark 10:46-52 · Philippians 2:1-11 · John 15:1-11**. Do not measure success by how much is written. Measure the method by whether it helps Scripture be read more carefully, understood more faithfully, and lived more intentionally.

ROOTED IN SCRIPTURE - POINTING TO JESUS

HEAR is valuable only insofar as it helps readers engage more faithfully with God's Word. The highlighted verse, journal entry, and acronym are not the destination. The goal is to know God through Scripture, understand His Word faithfully, recognize His redemptive work fulfilled in Jesus Christ, and respond with faith and obedience.

**Open the Bible. Pray for understanding. Read carefully.
Understand the context. Learn with other believers. Respond to
what God has actually said. And keep returning to Scripture.**