

Seven Step Process to Study and Apply God's Truth

This is a companion resource for two of my blog posts, [Seven Keys for Unlocking Life-Changing Truth](#) and [How to Apply God's Truth in Your Daily Life—An Easy to Follow Guide](#). I recommend you read the posts first then refer to this resource in which I've recorded my notes as I studied Luke 4:1-13 using the seven steps.



Note: purple underlined text, like in the above paragraph, indicate a link. If you click on the underlined words, you will access a website page with that content.

Seven Step Process to Study and Apply God's Truth

1. Study the Biblical passage (using the 7 Keys to Unlocking Life-Changing Truth).
2. Identify your takeaway statements.
3. Create a call to action.
4. Pinpoint application situations in your life.
5. Plan how you will put the truth into action.
6. Anticipate obstacles.
7. Activate the truth in your life by reverently loving God and doing what he commands (Ecc 12:13).

1. Study the Biblical passage

Each of the seven keys are described below along with my notes showing how I used each key to study Luke 4:1-13 (The Temptation of Jesus).

- 1) **Pray.** Believers have a powerful teacher: the Holy Spirit. Before you open your Bible, pray for God to help you understand what you read. (John 16:13)

Heavenly Father, you have revealed your truth and a clear revelation of who you are through your Word. Help me to understand what I am about to read and cause me to hear from you the truth you would have me know and apply in my life. In the name of Jesus and in the power of the Holy Spirit I pray. Amen.

- 2) **Use a study Bible.** A good one provides you with tools that assist you in using the rest of the keys in this list. Look for one with substantial introductions to each book, a good collection of maps, a concordance, and a time-line of the important events and people so you can see how they fit into the overall story.

I use the [NIV Study Bible by Zondervan](#).

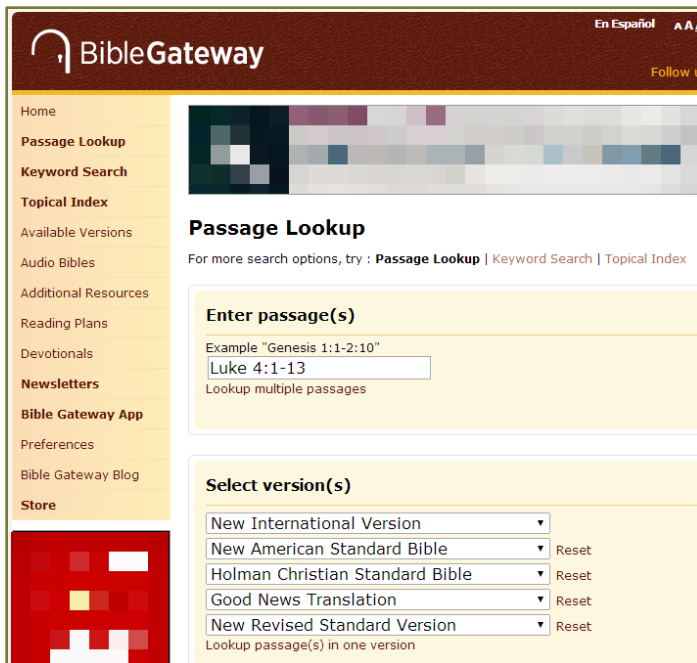
- 3) **Choose your primary translation wisely.** Since the vast majority of us cannot read the Bible in its original languages (Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek) we must read an English translation. The creators of these translations made crucial decisions about what

manuscripts to work from and which words they used to translate the original languages into English. The translation you use provides the first layer of interpretation of the inspired word of God. Choose one that is based on the oldest available manuscripts and which translates the original meaning of the words so they make the most sense to a contemporary English speaking reader. The **New International Version** (or the **Today's New International Version**), the Good News Bible, and the **New American Standard Bible** are great choices. FYI, when you purchase your study Bible make sure to select one in your preference for a primary translation.

I use the New International Version as my primary translation.

- 4) **Use more than one translation.** Compare your primary translation with others that used a different approach to the translation process. When two (or three, or four) translations differ on a particular passage, you will know there are various interpretations for this part of the text. Use these to inform your own interpretation. Good companions to the recommended primary translations above are: the **New Revised Standard Version**, the Revised English Bible, or the **New Jerusalem Bible**. You can use **www.BibleGateway.com** to compare a passage in multiple translations.

I like to consult <http://classic.net.bible.org/> which uses the New English Translation. I also use <http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/> to look at the passage in the NASB, Holman Christian Standard Bible, Good News Translation, and the NRSV.



- 5) **Discover the original meaning first.** God revealed truth by interacting with real people at specific points in history. A good study Bible can help you understand what the text meant to its original recipients. Then and only then can you determine the meaning or application of that truth to your life today. If our interpretation makes no sense for the original recipients of the passage, we are probably missing the mark. Instead, discover the meaning for them then apply that meaning to your situation now.

I like to read through the entire passage first.

Because our passage is in one of the Synoptic Gospels, it is also a good idea to read the parallel passages in Matthew (4:1-11) and Mark (1:12,13). (In most study Bibles, the notes will call attention to the parallels.) As I read these I note any differences and consult the notes in my Study Bible. The parallel passages will highlight the unique aspects and emphasis of ours.

I discovered Matthew and Luke both give detailed accounts of three specific temptations, while Mark summarizes the whole episode in two sentences without any specific temptations mentioned. There is a different order of the second and third temptations given by Matthew and Luke. This difference is likely due to Luke wanting to emphasize Jerusalem.

- 6) **Pay attention to context.** The Bible is not one book, but rather sixty-six books. This sixty-six volume library utilizes a variety of genres, recorded over many centuries by multiple authors under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. If you are reading a verse or two, these verses are part of a paragraph (or stanza if it is poetry). And that paragraph or stanza is part of an entire chapter. The chapter is part of a book. And the book is part of the library. The meaning of the smallest part (verse) must fit with the topic and meaning of the larger components within which the smaller is set. We get into real trouble if we pull a verse out of context and then try to interpret and apply it. If you have trouble figuring out what a verse means, use the context around it to help you.

Notice where the passage is relative to the rest of the Scripture. This passage is located in the Gospel of Luke which is in the New Testament.

This passage (4:1-13) follows the account of Jesus' baptism as well as a genealogy of Jesus. Both of these passages emphasize Jesus' fully human and fully divine nature. This is important because as a human being, Jesus is able to be tempted just as we are. But because of his divinity, he is like Adam was before the fall—without a fallen nature.

The passage immediately following the Temptation of Jesus tells how Jesus returned from the wilderness and taught with the power of the Spirit. In Luke 4:9-12, Satan tempts Jesus to test whether God will supernaturally save him if he throws himself off the highest point of the Temple. Jesus, instead of relying on his divine abilities, needs only his human ones to counter the devil's temptation. In the account that follows our passage, we see God does in fact supernaturally protect Jesus when he is in danger of being thrown from the cliff (Luke 4:28-30). The near proximity of these accounts highlights Jesus' ability to resist temptation and trust God to protect him.

- 7) **Ask who, what, when, where, how and why questions to determine the historical context.** Most of the time, the text itself will supply the answers to these questions. When it doesn't, a good study Bible or Bible dictionary will. **(much of what I give below comes from the introduction and/or notes in my Study Bible; I also find the book *How to Read the Bible Book by Book* and *The Eerdmans Companion to the Bible* supply useful contextual insights).** Historical context provides a necessary

constraint to your interpretation and application. You will be less likely to read your own modern experiences and ways of thinking into the passage when you know the context.

a) Who wrote the text?

While the author's name is not given in the text, most scholars agree that the writer was Luke, a Gentile physician and missionary who accompanied Paul. (Acts 1:1 indicates that this Gospel is a companion piece to Acts). Certain sections in Acts use the pronoun "we" (Acts 16:10–17; 20:5–15; 21:1–18; 27:1—28:16), which tells us the author accompanied Paul when those events took place. This along with Col 4:14 strongly indicate the writer is Paul's "dear friend Luke, the doctor" and "fellow worker" (Phm 24). Early Christian writings also support Luke's authorship.

b) To whom was the text written?

Luke 1:3 tells us it is written to "most excellent Theophilus." The "most excellent" tells us he was of a high position, possibly a Roman official who was Luke's patron (would finance and oversee the copying and distribution of the writings). The text itself tells us that Theophilus was using the text for his own personal instruction (1:4) as well as the instruction of other believers to whom the writings would be distributed. This is important because the teaching is intended for believers in general and not just one specific person in one specific situation.

The detailed descriptions of the places in the Holy Land could be a clue that the recipient(s) lived outside of and were unfamiliar with that area. Scholars suggest Antioch, Achaia or Ephesus as possible locations.

c) When and where was the text written?

The most commonly accepted date is A.D. 59-63 (prior to the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem and under the reign of Nero in which persecution of Christians was great) or the 70s or 80s.(after Roman sacked Jerusalem in A.D. 70 and destroyed the Temple and during reigns of Vespasian, Titus or early part of Domitian's reign) With any of these dates, Herod Agrippa II would have been the ruler in charge of Judea. For a Christian in these times, persecution would have been an ever-present possibility.

Luke may have written from Rome or Achaia, Ephesus or Caesarea.

d) Why was it written?

"So that you [Theophilus] may know the certainty of the things you have been taught" Luke 1:4

The purpose: give a "carefully investigated" and "orderly account" to strengthen the faith of believers and counter claims of unbelievers (Luke 1:3)

Luke also seems to be concerned with giving evidence that Jesus himself taught that Gentiles had a place in God's kingdom.

Encourage the spread of the gospel throughout the whole world (24:47)

e) What situation or topic was addressed?

The Gospel of Luke as a whole emphasizes the nature of Jesus' kingdom and mission using the following themes:

- **universality (Gentiles, as well as Jews, had a place in the kingdom)**
- **prayer**
- **joy**
- **concern for women, the poor, and sinners**
- **family and home life**
- **Son of Man as a Messianic title for Jesus**
- **Holy Spirit's power and role**
- **parables (more than any other Gospel)**
- **praise for God**

In this particular portion of Luke (4:1-13) there is a strong emphasis on:

- **Jesus' humanity**
- **the power of the Scripture to help one overcome temptation**
- **the reality of the devil and his persistent attacks**

f) How did the author convey the message?

Luke used a straight-forward, orderly account of historical events based on genealogies, reliable source documents (the gospel of Mark), and eyewitness testimonies.

g) What genre is this text?

A gospel - a book about Jesus and containing a significant amount of his teaching. Each gospel was written by a specific person for a specific portion of the Christian community—each one with its unique needs, themes, and style. These four accounts offer "the facts about Jesus, recall the teaching of Jesus, and bear witness to Jesus."¹

With this information in focus, we return to our passage (Luke 4:1-13) and read it again. I like to read it from the multi-translation page so I can note any differences. When translators use different words or have some other significant difference I want to dig deeper using other study tools such as Bible Dictionaries, Word study tools, Maps, etc.

Read through the text, focusing sentence by sentence. Make notes about things you want to study further and then go look those up in your various resources. Jot down your results and

¹ How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth.2279/4947 Kindle location. Douglas Stuart and Gordon D. Fee. Zondarvan, Grand Rapids, Michigan. ePub edition.

any conclusions you draw. At this stage I am mining the text for information that I will then synthesize into key ideas presented by the text.

I break down the whole passage (4:1-13) into paragraphs or logical units. Much of our passage is a dialogue and so rather than strict paragraph by paragraph division, I chose to look at each particular conversation. Then for each unit I summarize the main idea or theme.

The first section, 4:1-2, establishes the setting and conditions.

Details I observed in this section:

- Jesus is "full of the Holy Spirit" - This connects our passage with the account that immediately precedes it (Jesus' baptism). He is able to draw upon the power of the Holy Spirit during the events that follow. As believers, we also have access to the Holy Spirit who dwells in us.
- I noticed only the NIV used the word "left" while the other translators chose to use the word "returned" to note Jesus' direction. Using <http://classic.net.bible.org/verse.php?book=Luk&chapter=4&verse=1> I determined "returned" seems to be the better translation. This tells me Jesus was going back toward the area in which he had been prior to his baptism (somewhere in Judea). In this case, I don't see it impacts the translation, but I always like to look up words that differ in the various translations.
- The concept of Jesus being led by or led around by the Spirit coupled with the meaning of the word "sunteleo" translated as "at the end" (NIV) or "ended" (NASB) or "over" (HCSB, NRSV, and GNB) or "completed" (NET) in verse 2 (it means fulfilled, brought to its intended conclusion or end) indicates that the Holy Spirit led Jesus to this place for a purpose accomplished in the events that occurred.
- The use of the term "wilderness" as well as the time designation of "forty" is an Exodus motif (Moses et al wandering in the wilderness for forty years) and connects Jesus to Moses. The term "forty" can be used both literally and figuratively in the Bible. When used figuratively it represents a long, indefinite period of time, exceeding a lunar cycle.
- During this long time period Jesus ate nothing (this can mean he only ate what the desert provided; very little) and thus was very hungry (and probably very weak). That he is hungry is evidence of his humanness.
- He was tempted throughout this forty day period (v.2) but the temptations recorded in this passage are the only ones detailed for us. These temptations came at the end of the period when Jesus would have been at his weakest. Temptation is strongest when we are at our weakest.

My summary of the main idea of this section:

- A very human Jesus is filled with the Holy Spirit and endures a long period of temptation which becomes most intense when he is at his weakest.

The next section is the first temptation (4:3-4).

Details I observed in this section:

- Both Matthew and Luke present the temptation to turn stones into bread as the first temptation. The most obvious weakness is hunger and that is where Satan starts.
- In English it seems as though Satan calls into question Jesus' identity as the Son of God, which had been acknowledged by God at Jesus' baptism (Luke 3:22; Matthew 3:17). However, the Greek is clear this is not the case. This is a first class conditional statement which means the speaker assumes the statement is true. Sort of like saying, "So, since you're the Son of God..."; But before I saw that in the NET notes, the "If you are" made me think, "Who does God say I am and how easily do I forget or lose sight of that when the enemy tempts me to doubt my identity as God's child?"
- Satan wasn't questioning whether Jesus was the Son of God, he was tempting him to use that position and power to serve himself rather than rely upon God's provision and the strength provided by the Holy Spirit and reserve the power and position of being the Son of God for its intended purpose (to save humanity from sin). How many times do I squander my God given power and position on serving myself rather than on helping others?
- Jesus responds out of his humanness and reliance upon God's revealed truth in the Scriptures. Matthew quotes Deut 8:3 in its entirety while Luke only quotes the first part. Result: Jesus will not use his divine power to serve himself.

My summary of the main idea of this section:

- Satan uses Jesus' greatest weakness in that moment (hunger) to attack his greatest point of strength (his power and position as Son of God) and Jesus overcomes by knowing, believing, and relying on God's Word.

The next section (4:5-8) is the temptation to worship Satan in return for dominion over the earthly kingdoms.

Details I observed in this section:

- It is Satan now, rather than the Holy Spirit, who is leading Jesus to a destination. (v. 5) and the destination is a "high place" (NET note said the original Greek doesn't have "high place" but it is implied by the Greek and supplied in the English for clarity). Idol worship /

apostasy took place in the high places atop mountains. So it seems appropriate that Satan would take Jesus to a "high place" and propose that particular temptation.

- The use of the term "moment in time" seems to indicate that perhaps this was a supernatural vision - able to see all earthly kingdoms at all times in a moment of time or an instant.
- It is unclear from the text whether what Satan claims is actually true or is a lie. Other places in Scripture indicate he is the ruler of this world, that God has permitted him the authority over the earthly realm but not given up his (God's) sovereignty over it. In other words, Satan has only what God allows him to have and God is actually the ultimate authority.
- Whether Satan's claims are true or not, what he asks of Jesus (to bow down and worship him) is wrong. And that is what Jesus addresses in his response by quoting again from Deuteronomy (6:13).
- *In his commentary on Luke, Dr. Bob Utley* noted that while Satan *claims* authority, God *has* authority and in remaining obedient to God Jesus will have the authority given him by the Father.

My summary of the main idea of this section:

- Jesus chooses obedience to God's revealed will rather than believe Satan, who, in the past, has persuaded others (Adam and Eve, for example) to disobey by using lies to call into question God's commands.

In 4:9-12, Satan tempts Jesus to put God to the test and in so doing garner public attention.

Details I observed in this section:

- The temptation takes place in Jerusalem at the highest point of the Temple. This would be in full view of many people. Luke emphasizes the importance Jerusalem.
- Satan quotes Psalm 91:11,12. While he recites all the words correctly, he lifts them out of their context (which is trusting in the faithfulness of God) and thus misuses them to tempt Jesus to put that faithfulness to the test. (Good caution to us not to take Scripture out of context and use a proof text approach.)
- Jesus responds by again quoting Deuteronomy (6:16) (notice that all three quotes are from Deuteronomy's account of the Israelites in the wilderness) and essentially returns the misused Psalm 91 back to its proper context: God IS faithful and to intentionally test his faithfulness would reveal a lack of trust in his faithfulness.

- I think it is interesting Satan quotes the portion of Ps 91 regarding the angels guarding and not allowing harm to come to him(Jesus). In Mark, we don't have the detailed accounts of these three specific temptations but the writer does record that the angels attended Jesus in the wilderness. I wonder if Jesus, in the moment of this temptation, realized the angels were in fact already guarding and attending him? He had no need to put God to the test, God was already showing his faithfulness and provision.

My summary of the main idea of this section:

- God is faithful and a proper understanding of his revealed Word confirms that.

In the last verse, 4:13, Satan leaves with the intention of resuming his temptations at a more opportune time.

Details I observed in this section and my summary of the main idea of this section:

- Temptation may abate but we must be on guard at all times because our weak or unaware moments may provide the opportune time our enemy needs to attack us.

Having done my study of the text, next I list my summary statements for the five sections:

- A very human Jesus is filled with the Holy Spirit and endures a long period of temptation which becomes most intense when he is at his weakest.
- Satan uses Jesus' greatest weakness in that moment (hunger) to attack his greatest point of strength (his power and position as Son of God) and Jesus overcomes by knowing, believing, and relying on God's Word.
- Jesus chooses obedience to God's revealed will rather than believe Satan, who has persuaded disobedience through lies in the past.
- God is faithful and a proper understanding of his revealed Word confirms that.
- Temptation may abate but we must be on guard at all times because our weak or unaware moments may provide the opportune time our enemy needs to attack us.

2. Identify my takeaway statements

What are my "takeaways" from this passage?

- The Holy Spirit and knowledge of God's Word provide the means of successfully overcoming temptation and trusting in God's faithfulness and ability to provide for our needs.

- Temporary weaknesses can be used to tempt us to doubt God and his eternal truth.
- The apparent temptation is not always the actual temptation.
- The best preparation for facing temptation is to know God's Word well enough to use it correctly to refute the lies with which the tempter will ply us.

3. Create my call to action.

When faced with temptation I will refute the temptation and shore up my weakness by speaking the revealed truth of God.

4. Pinpoint Situations in which You Can Apply this Truth/Call to Action.

Identify areas in which I am regularly tempted. What is behind the temptation(s); am I being tempted to serve self, worship something instead of God, test God's faithfulness, etc.

- Food is a huge area of temptation for me. I am tempted to eat unhealthy foods that seem to supply a sense of comfort, distraction, reward, etc. This is a form of idol worship. This temptation is an everyday situation for me.

5. Plan how I will put the truth into action.

How can I apply these takeaway truths in my life today/this week?

- Since knowing God's Word will arm me to fight temptation, I best have some relevant passages at the ready. So I will use a topical Bible, concordance, etc. to look up verses that address temptations. Choose those that are most powerful and memorize them.
 - **1 Corinthians 10:13** No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it. (ESV)
 - **Hebrews 2:18** For because he [Jesus] himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted. (ESV)
 - **Deuteronomy 8:3** He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your ancestors had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord. (NIV)
- Be watchful for tempting situations, guard against becoming especially weak (hungry, tired, stressed, etc.), and speak the memorized Word of God in response. Remember not to let a temporary situation cause me to question my eternal God or his eternal truth.

- Look through the apparent temptation (warm brownie) to see the underlying temptation (seek comfort from something other than God).
- Be aware of the power of the Holy Spirit within me and the power of God's Word to refute the lies with which I am tempted. Look for the ways God has provided for me to escape temptation.

6. Anticipate obstacles to following through with my plan.

What obstacles to applying this might I face? How could I handle that obstacle?

Obstacle: Getting hungry and not having healthy food choices on hand.

Solution: Pack some healthy snacks in my purse and/or car.

Obstacle: Becoming very tired, stressed, hungry.

Solution: Be intentional about maintaining a balanced schedule (also a struggle for me), getting enough sleep, and eating small healthy meals throughout the day (be careful not to get lost in what I'm doing and forget to eat only to look up when it is time to get on the road and be tempted to grab an unhealthy portable option.)

Obstacle: I could come up against a temptation for which I don't have a passage memorized.

Solution: This is why I have chosen some general passages about relying on and obeying God rather than just those about food. In these situations, I can also recall what I know of God's character as revealed by Christ. How can I exhibit that same character in this situation?

Obstacle: What if I can't recall the passage exactly?

Solution: Don't worry about quoting it verbatim. Know the truth and context and draw upon those to paraphrase the passage. (Satan quoted but missed the context and truth; it is better to have the truth and paraphrase it while retaining the meaning and context than to quote exactly and miss the point entirely—that is what Satan did with Psalm 91).

7. Activate the truth in my life by reverently loving God and doing what he commands (Ecc 12:13).

This is where I shut my Bible, turn off my computer, and get out there in life and put the truth into action!

A closing thought...

I pray this helps you put this process into action in your own study and application of God's Word. ***Email me*** and let me know how it works for you!

Blessings of truth and grace,

Laura

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