

## Developing Better Bible Study Skills

### INTRODUCTION:

- Benefits of Bible study. What are benefits of Bible study?
  - Joshua 1:7-8; Psalm 1; 19:7-11; 119.
- Necessity of getting it right - II Timothy 2:15; 3:15-17; James 1:25; II Peter 1:20-21; 3:15-16.
- The Goal of Bible study: *to understand the original meaning and apply it to life.* Every Christian ought to be able to “self-feed” on God’s word!

### I. Method of Bible study:

#### A. Literal?

1. Not really. Strictly literal interpretation results in misunderstandings.
2. Often called literal, but not in the strict sense.

#### B. Then what?

1. We seek to use the **Historical-Grammatical Method**.
2. What is the Historical-Grammatical Method?
  - a. The meaning derived from the text’s historical setting.
  - b. From the context.
  - c. And from the grammar of the text.

### II. Preparing to Study the Bible.

A. Confess sin - be a clean vessel (James 1:21; I John 1:9). We can’t see the text clearly with the dirt of sin clouding our eyes. Sin affects every area of our lives, including our thoughts, insights, and reason.

#### B. Submit to God.

1. Acknowledge God is in charge; be determined to understand His meaning for the passage. Let God teach! We call Him Teacher and Lord, so let Him be our Teacher and Lord!
2. Invite and allow the Holy Spirit to be your Teacher (I Corinthians 2:12; I John 2:27). The Author of Scripture dwells within us. Let Him instruct us.

### III. Beginner Bible Study. May help us teach others to study Scripture.

A. What do I learn about God? (Acts 22:8).

B. What do I learn about what God wants me to do? (Acts 22:10).

C. Best (recommended) books for beginners: John, Psalms, Proverbs, James, and Genesis.

#### IV. Basic Bible Study Review (2PROAPT).

- P - Pray
- P - Preview
- R - Read
- O - Observe
- A - Apply
- P - Pray
- T - Tell

#### V. Context Is Key.

##### A. Important to remember:

1. Most questions of *meaning* are answered by the *context*.
2. “*Text* without *context* is *pretext*!”

##### B. The rings of context:

1. The sentence, the paragraph, the chapter, the book, the author, the Testament, the Bible. The true meaning fits in every level of the context.
2. Take time to review and become familiar with the context.

##### C. Unlocking the context:

###### 1. Observe the literary context:

###### a. History.

- 1) Genesis - Job; Daniel 1-6; Matthew - Acts; found in other books, as well.
- 2) Records what happened, **NOT** what should be done.
- 3) Evaluate behaviors and actions from other teaching. Even if they did the right thing in their setting; it does not mean we should copy their actions. Do emulate their faith.

###### b. Poetry.

- 1) Job - Song of Solomon; some poetry found in other books, as well.
- 2) May have figurative language and other “artistic” elements. Beware of being too literal. If natural sense does NOT make sense...

###### c. Prophetic.

- 1) Means speaking directly from God and may include past, present, or future.
- 2) Isaiah - Malachi; found in other books, as well.

- 3) May have figurative elements.
- 4) Watch for simile, “like” and “as.”
- 5) Prophecy often has more than one fulfillment: near and far (at times distant). Prophetic Perspective: like a mountain range from a distance looks like one peak, but isn’t.

d. Apocalyptic Future.

- 1) Revelation; found in other books, as well.
- 2) It often has more than one fulfillment: near and far (at times distant).
- 3) Let the text tell you if it is figurative; watch for simile, “like” and “as.”

e. Didactic / Teaching.

- 1) Exodus - Deuteronomy; Romans - Jude; found in other books, as well.
- 2) Direct instruction.
- 3) **Clearest form of Biblical instruction. Use clear passages to help you understand less clear or unclear texts.**
- 4) Keep in mind the identity of the author and the original readers. (e.g., Heb. 6:4-8 -- does not teach we can lose our salvation. Original readers were Hebrews. Some had been OT believers. If they rejected the Messiah they lost their OT salvation.)

2. Observe key words:

- Therefore, for, but, that, so that, in order that, and, not...but, if...then, if not...then, in the same way, just as, for this reason...

3. Watch for simile; especially in parables and apocalyptic:

- As, like... Frog legs taste “like” chicken, but they aren’t chicken.

4. Observe the tense of the verbs (past, present, future).

5. Diagram sentences for relationships. - What modifies what?

6. Learn the Historical context. - Bible handbook or Commentary.

D. Notice repeated words and phrases within the context, e.g.: Ecclesiastes (“under the sun” and “under heaven” - meaning here on earth and not for God). Ezekiel (“that they may know that I am God” - in a few variations).

E. Observe parallelisms - same meaning with different wording (e.g., Psalm 39:4).

F. Examples:

1. Out of context, confusion - Phil. 4:13. What does “all things” include?
2. In context, fuller meaning - John 3:16. Vv. 14-15 with Numbers 21:4-9; people were already dead because of the bite, but if they trusted God and looked to the serpent, they lived; people are already dead in their

sins (Col. 2:13), but if they trust God and believe in Jesus, they will have eternal life instead of eternal dying.

3. Book where context is least important - Proverbs.

4. Book where context is highly important - Job. Everything Job's friends say is suspect and should be quoted and applied with caution (Job 42:7-8).

## VI. Understanding the Text

A. Let it speak for itself. Take God at His word!

1. Beware of *making it* fit your perspective. "Isaygesis" instead of exegesis.

2. "If the natural sense makes sense, seek no other sense."

B. A test of understanding:

1. The Bible *never* conflicts with or contradicts itself.

2. If two texts appear to be in conflict, you misunderstand one or both of them.

C. Commentaries and study Bible notes *follow* individual study.

1. The teaching of others can be very useful and helpful.

2. Only the Bible is inspired and 100% accurate. - Know text well before going to commentaries and other sources. This will help you identify error in the commentator.

3. Know the author:

a. Is he/she generally liberal or conservative?

b. Education?

c. Occupation?

d. View of Scripture?

e. Approach to interpretation?

f. Doctrinal viewpoint?

4. "Sometimes the Bible can shed a lot of light on the commentaries."

- Does it say what the text says?

D. Ask questions:

1. Begin with:

- Who? What? Where? Why? When? How? Which?

2. ***Truth can always endure testing, so inquire about anything!***

E. Observations - what it says, teaches, means, and implies.

1. Explicit teaching. - What it actually says. Eph. 5:18 - don't get drunk on wine.

2. Implicit teaching. - What it implies. Eph. 5:18 - don't get drunk or high on anything.

3. A good Bible student often sees what is actually there, but what others often fail to notice.
4. Obedience increases our ability to perceive (Hebrews 5:11-14).
5. Use cross references:
  - a. Parallel passages can help you understand both texts.
  - b. Other uses of a word can help you understand its meaning.
  - c. Caution: parallels have their own context!
6. Observation is the meat of Bible study. (Jas. 1:25; II Tim. 2:15) Look intently... Be diligent... Work hard at this. Give it effort equal to the literature! ...to the Author!

F. Word studies.

1. How the word is used elsewhere in the Bible - concordances.
2. Look up the word in Bible dictionaries and encyclopedias.

G. Cautions:

1. **Beware** of allegorizing, especially in parables.
2. **Beware** of making it “figurative.”
3. Parables - know the **purpose** of the parable from the context.
4. **Beware** of making it less literal than the context requires. (Gen.1; Exod. 20:8-11) e.g., how long is a day?

H. Applications - how it affects my life.

1. How must I change in order to submit?
2. We need correct observations to make appropriate applications.
3. Study without living it is dangerous and foolish (Matthew 7:15-27).

I. Example: God is everywhere. He is with me here and now, wherever and whenever here and now is. How does this affect the way I live?

1. Encourages - we are never alone; God’s power and guidance are always available.
2. Accountability - we never do, say, or think anything in secret. Pray without ceasing, since God is always with us.

J. Good book on how to study the Bible:

- “Living by the Book” by Howard and William Hendricks.

K. Best tools for Bible study (in order of importance):

1. Concordances.
2. Bible handbooks: Unger’s.
3. Commentaries - begin with Evangelical, Conservative authors: The Bible Knowledge Commentary.
4. Bible atlases.
5. Bible dictionaries.
6. Bible encyclopedias: Zondervan.