

HOW TO READ & STUDY THE BIBLE

Introduction

“It takes a whole bible to teach a whole Christ to make a whole Christian.” **Sinclair Ferguson**

1. Our **objective** is to learn how to read and study our Bibles! It is imperative to acquire the tools necessary to study the Bible.
2. Our **goal** in reading and studying the Bible is to behold the Lord and to become like Him! The end game in all bible study is to behold our God and to supremely delight in Him!
3. Our **“problem”** to study. Expect spiritual warfare every time you open the word!
 - a. Our first problem to any serious study of Scripture is Satan himself. Matt 13:19, “When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart.” Our minds are the battlefield in which the spiritual war is fought. No truth can be embraced with our hearts that has not first been understood with our minds!
 - b. Our second problem is our flesh! One of the most common ways the flesh hinders our reading and studying of the Bible is “laziness”. Prov. 26:14, “As a door turns on its hinges, so does a sluggard on his bed.” By God’s grace we must lead our own hearts to the word.
 - c. Our third problem is the world! Mark 4:16-19, “And others are the ones sown among thorns. They are those who hear the word, but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches and the desires for other things enter in and choke the word, and it proves unfruitful.” The world threatens to choke the word. The world, through the lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh and the pride of life, slowly but surely cuts off our ability to spiritually breathe and bear fruit for God. Even after we are born again, our flesh still craves for a life of ease and comfort. The world distracts us and impairs our ability to concentrate!
 - d. Our fourth problem that hinders the meaningful study of Scripture is Mysticism. Mysticism is an attempt to grow in your relationship with God by relying on spiritual experiences rather than the study of Scripture! Mysticism occurs when we start relating to God by subjective experiences and not by the objective truth of Scripture. The real problem of mysticism is that it separates the Spirit of God from the written word of God!
 - i. “I think the greatest weakness in the church today is that almost no one believes that God invests His power in the Bible. Everyone is looking for power in a program, in a technique, in anything and everything except where God has placed it: His word!” R.C. Sproul
 - ii. The Holy Spirit bears witness with the Word and through the Word, and never against the Word or without the Word.
 - e. Our fifth problem is simply the problem of poor planning, or no planning at all! If we don’t have a real plan then there will not be any real progress.

- i. How do we address these problems??
 - 1. Re-lay the firm foundation! We need to know “what” the Bible is! The Bible is God’s Facebook. It’s where we go to meet face to face with God. God has revealed Himself in a book. The Bible is the very voice of God written (i.e. captured in writing)! *See addendum for a few passages associating the hearing of God’s commands as written in Scripture with hearing His voice)*

- 4. Our “**preparation**” to study
 - a. Four intensely practical steps!
 - i. Set apart the time and place.

 - ii. Prepare your heart with “2” prayers.
 - 1. First, pray with thanksgiving for the gospel! Begin your time by thanking God that everything that was needed for you to come into His presence, and to come with confidence, has already been provided by Christ! We are attractive to God, not because we’re in our Bibles...we’re attractive because we’re in Christ! When we take a minute or two to pray the gospel, we will approach the Scriptures in faith, gratitude and joy!

 - 2. Second, pray for understanding (see Prov. 2:1-5; Eph. 1:15 for examples). Although we must open the word, it is God alone who must open our hearts!

 - iii. Read broadly and read deeply. Best way to prepare to study is by reading.
 - 1. Read broadly. Just read. Don’t worry about understanding it. At this level you’re concerned with familiarity.

 - 2. Read deeply. Slow down! Deep reading is when you take a few verses and go over them again and again and again in your mind. You’re entering into meditation and memorization at this point.

 - iv. Have a pen and paper in hand. Journal. Come expecting the Holy Spirit to answer your prayer and open your eyes to behold wonderful things in the Word. Write down those truths.

“The OIA model” Observation, Interpretation, and Application.

Observation: What does it say?

Interpretation: What does it mean?

Application: What does obedience look like?

5. Our “plan” to study

- a. Observation – At this first step of study we are moving from seeing to observing. Seeing occurs when we’re reading. Observing occurs when we begin to read deep, when we actually stop at a passage and begin to analyze it and pull it apart.
 - i. “When I hear you give your reasons, the thing always appears to me to be so ridiculously simple that I could easily do it myself, though at each successive instance of your reasoning, I am baffled until you explain your process. And yet I believe that my eyes are as good as yours.” “Quite so,” Holmes answered, lighting a cigarette, and throwing himself down into an armchair. “You see, but you do not observe. The distinction is clear. For example, you have frequently seen the steps which lead up from the hall to this room.” “Frequently”. “How often?” “Well, some hundreds of times.” “Then how many are there?” “How many? I don’t know.” “Quite so! You have not observed. And yet you have seen. That is just my point. Now, I know that there are seventeen steps, because I have both seen and observed.” **Sherlock Holmes**
 - ii. In the observing stage our main concern is to ask questions. As we carefully observe the text, we want to begin asking questions of the text that move from general questions to more specific questions...
 - iii. **General questions**: Who is the author? Who is the audience? What is the genre? (Historical narrative; poetry; didactic; hyperbole, parable, apocalyptic) Genre is important because it relates to interpretation.
 - iv. **Specific observations**: What specific words are being used? Is there word repetition? Why is that word, or words being repeated? What verbs are being used? Verbs are very important! What are the dependent clauses? (For, therefore, since, in order that). What is the mood? (Is this Jesus washing His disciple’s feet or Jesus throwing over tables in the temple?) A very important specific observation is “what’s the context?” Every text has a context. Every verse has to be observed in its immediate context.
- b. Interpretation--by far the most important step in our study. It is in this step specifically where we hone our skills. It is right here where we are asking for our prayer for understanding to be realized.
 - i. Avoiding the pitfall of eisegesis. Eisegesis means the reading into the text one’s own ideas and preconceived ideas! Eisegesis occurs whenever we are not careful to think carefully, critically and consistently through a text.

1. An example of eisegesis from John 3:16, “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son so that whosoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.”
 2. Eisegesis reads into this verse the idea that if eternal life is dependent on believing...then man must have the ability (apart from God) to believe. But that interpretation is a failure to carefully observe what the verse is and isn't saying! The one, and the only one who can and who will believe on Christ, is the one who has been born again (larger immediate context of chapter 3).
 3. Theology matters! One of the most common errors made in rightly interpreting the Bible is to read it through the lens of being man centered. The bible is God centered, not man centered.
- ii. Exegesis is a reading out of the text its true meaning which is derived by a careful, objective analysis of the text. “The meaning of the Scripture is the Scripture!” **John MacArthur**
- iii. How do we get the meaning? How do we rightly interpret Scripture by doing exegesis?
- iv. 4 main things
1. Observe your observations! Ask questions of your questions! Begin to interrogate your observations!
 - a. In the interpretation stage we're asking “What is the authors “original” intent? Why did he say this? How would the original audience have understood this?”
 - b. Don't ask “what does this mean to me?” Ask, “What would this have meant to the original hearers!”
 - c. By far the most important observation we must make of our observations, is... “What does this tell me about Christ?”
 2. Prayerful meditation! At this stage in the game we've slowed everything down. We're chewing on a text, ruminating over it. Contemplating it.
 - a. When Spurgeon was asked, “What is more important: praying or reading the Bible? He responded by asking, what is more important, breathing in or breathing out?”
 - b. Prayerful meditation is spiritual breathing. We are breathing in deeply of God's word and we are breathing out deeply for understanding.
 3. Compare Scripture with Scripture (a.k.a. analogy of faith). Understand the text is concentric contexts! The whole counsel of God must harmonize! There can be no contradictions!
 - a. An example of comparing Scripture with Scripture from church history: James 2:24, “That a person is justified by works and not by faith alone.” At first glance this appears to be a glaring

contradiction with the apostle Paul's understanding of justification by faith alone (see Romans 3:19-4:25).

- b. After careful analysis and comparing Scripture with Scripture, the Reformers understood that James was not contradicting Paul. James was simply describing the kind of faith that justifies. "Faith, thus receiving and resting on Christ and His righteousness, is the alone instrument of justification; yet it is not alone in the person justified, but is ever accompanied with all other saving graces, and is no dead faith, but works by love." **London Baptist Confession (LBC) 11:2**

4. Study with a good commentary. It is very wise to study with others. They'll keep us in check. Ask your pastors for recommendations.

- c. Application – In the interpretation phase we behold Christ. In the application phase we become like Christ. In other words, application is all about "doing what we hear", or "practicing what we preach"!
 - i. James 1:22, "But be doers of the word and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves!"
 - ii. If our bible reading and bible study is going to ultimately be profitable...we must do it! To hear and even rightly understand the Bible, but not do what it says, is deception which leads to hypocrisy!
 - iii. "By this faith a Christian believes to be true whatsoever is revealed in the word for the authority of God Himself, and also apprehends an excellency therein above all other writings and all things in the world, as it bears forth the glory of God in His attributes, the excellency of Christ in His nature and offices, and the power and fullness of the Holy Spirit in His workings and operations: and is so enabled to cast his soul upon the truth believed; and also acts differently upon that which each particular passage thereof contains; yielding obedience to the commands, trembling at the threatenings, and embracing the promises of God for this life and that which is to come; but the principle acts of saving faith have immediate relation to Christ, accepting, receiving and resting upon Him alone for justification, sanctification and eternal life, by virtue of the covenant of grace." **LBC 14:2**
 - iv. When it comes to applying any given text... get very specific! Every text demands application in one form or another! So whether we are to pray, praise, confess sin, evangelize, give, wait or worship ...whatever the text impresses upon us...that we must do! And when we apply what we hear, we are at that moment truly worshipping God!

6. Four closing words

- a. Simplify. If need be, simplify the OIA model. What does this tell me about God and how should I respond?

- b. Persevere. Persevere in season and out of season. Expect seasons where you feel dry. Keep sowing!
- c. Remember. Remember that reading and studying our bibles doesn't save us. Jesus saves us. But Jesus gave us His word so that we can know and love Him who saved us. Be motivated by gratitude not guilt.
- d. Thanks and benediction.

Addendum

1. "Knowing Scripture" by R.C. Sproul
2. <https://www.ligonier.org/blog/bible-reading-plans/>
3. A non-exhaustive list of passages denoting the equivalence between Scripture and God's voice - Deut. 13:4, 18; 15:5; 26:17; 27:10; 28:1-2, 15, 45, 62; Judges 2:20; Jeremiah 7:23-24; 9:13; 11:7; Daniel 9:11, 14