

How to Study the Bible

Why study the Bible?

It is the very Word of God (2Tim 3:16). It contains the power of God (Heb 4:12; 1Thes 2:13). It is the only means by which we understand how to convert the unbeliever (Rom 1:16), combat sin (Ps 119:9-11), grow spiritually (2Pet 3:18), and be conformed into the image of Christ (Phil 2:5). God uses his Word to adequately equip all believers for every good work (2Tim 3:17).

In order to teach the Bible, a pastor must study the Bible. Improper study leads to improper teaching and improper living.

It is impossible to lead men to faith in God using the persuasive speech and preaching of human wisdom. This leads men to faith in men. Our goal, as pastors is to lead men to the knowledge of God through the wisdom of the Holy Spirit. We should determine to know nothing except Jesus Christ and him crucified (1Cor 2).

Being a student of the Word of God

1. FAITH - An effective student of the Word has placed his faith in Jesus Christ for salvation.
2. HUMILITY - A humble student is ready to be taught by God's Word and live under its authority.
3. HOLINESS - The student must conduct his life according to the Word of God.
4. PRAYER - The study of God's Word is a conversation. The student speaks to God in prayer. God speaks to the student through his Word.

How to Study the Bible

There are three basic steps to understanding the Bible.

1. Read - What does the text say?
2. Interpret - What does the text mean?
3. Apply - What does the text tell me to do?

READ

The first step of Bible study is to simply read the text. At this point the goal is observe what the text says and identify **the main point of the passage**. The main point of any passage of Scripture is best identified by reading it in the context of the entire book (e.g. Romans). It is best to read the book multiple times. Avoid the temptation to stop and interpret individual passages during this step. READ. READ. READ. (If you are unable to read, listen to the book of the Bible as it is read aloud. LISTEN. LISTEN. LISTEN.)

INTERPRET

The goal of interpretation: to understand what the original author intended by what he wrote and what the original hearers would have understood.

Ask questions of the text

- Who is the author?
- Who is the author writing to?
- Is the passage part of an epistle, historical narrative, prophecy or parable?
- What do the words mean?
- What is the author communicating to his audience?

AVOID adding subjects not present in the text or leaving out subjects that are.

AVOID looking for deeper or hidden meanings that are not clearly stated in the text.

Because the Bible is inspired by God it is consistent from beginning to end. God does not contradict Himself. With this in mind, one must ask the question: “Does my interpretation of this particular verse contradict any other doctrine of the Bible?” If it does, the interpretation contains error and should be reevaluated.

Special rules for interpreting PARABLES, PROVERBS and FIGURES OF SPEECH

There are special rules of interpretation that apply to certain types of biblical literature. One of these in particular is Jesus’ use of parables.

PARABLES

What is a parable?

A parable is an **earthly story** drawn from everyday life that communicates a **spiritual meaning**.

Parables are most often found in Jesus’ teachings recorded in Matthew, Mark and Luke.

What is the purpose of a parable?

Parables communicate a central truth or idea. They are used generally to:

- Teach one key truth
- Make one key point
- Illustrate a truth
- Answer a question
- Correct a wrong belief or teaching

Jesus used parables not to **reveal** truth but to **conceal** it (Matt. 13:11-13). Many times his own disciples did not understand the point he was making (Matt. 13:36; Mk 7:17-18). This technique of teaching was effective in drawing out those who were particularly interested in the spiritual truth Jesus was teaching (Matt. 13:9). Those who were only superficially interested would lose interest because they were spiritually dull (Matt. 13:14-16).

Jesus would often explain the parable later to the disciples (e.g. Matt. 13:18).

What is the special rule of interpreting parables?

The goal of interpreting parables is to **determine the main idea** that it is communicating. The details of the parable relate to and support the main idea - they are not greatly significant in themselves.

PROVERBS

Proverbs are short statements used to teach a general truth or principle. They are not meant to be understood as promises or guarantees. Wise actions most often lead to positive results while foolish actions most often lead to negative results. While this is generally true, it can be observed that bad things can sometimes happen to godly people (e.g. Job).

FIGURES OF SPEECH

A figure of speech is an unusual word or phrase that is used to create a mental picture. The goal of the interpreter is to determine what is the literal idea or principle behind the figure.

For example, Peter writes that “all men are like grass” (1Pet 1:24). The literal truth behind the figure “all men are like grass” is that the glory of man fades away. Just as grass withers, so does the glory of man.

APPLY

Applying the text to one's life is the ultimate goal of all Bible study. All Bible study is a waste of time unless the reader obeys its message. The goal of Scripture, as already stated, is to produce maturity in the believer. Obedience to God's Word is essential to living the life that Jesus Christ intended for all true believers. Jesus said, "If anyone loves me, he will keep my word; and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. He who does not love me does not keep my words" (John 14:23-24).

The power of God in the believer to walk in obedience is given by the Holy Spirit. Paul wrote, "...if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God." (Romans 8:13-14).

Helpful questions to consider...

In this passage, is there:

- A command to obey?
- A sin to confess and repent of?
- An attitude to correct?
- A promise to claim?
- A truth to believe?
- An example to follow?
- An action to take?

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