

I. Reasons We Study the Bible

God speaking in the written Word is more certain than an audible voice.

II Peter 1:17-21 – “For when he received honor and glory from God the Father, and the voice was borne to him by the Majestic Glory, ‘This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased,’¹⁸ we ourselves heard this very voice borne from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain.¹⁹ And we have the prophetic word more fully confirmed, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts,²⁰ knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation.²¹ For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.”

The Word of God endures for all time and feeds us to grow in our salvation.

I Peter 1:22-2:3 – “Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart,²³ since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God;²⁴ for ‘All flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls,²⁵ but the word of the Lord remains forever.’ And this word is the good news that was preached to you.^{2:1} So put away all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander.² Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation –³ if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good.”

The Holy Scriptures lead us to salvation and equip us to be complete for all of life.

II Timothy 3:10-17 – “But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it¹⁵ and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.¹⁶ All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness,¹⁷ that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.”

The Word of God is living and active and pierces into the depth of our soul.

Hebrews 4:12-13 – “For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.¹³ And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.”

II. Principles for Studying the Bible

1. Recognize and account for the dual authorship of Scripture.

- Jesus was fully God and full Man; He had a divine nature and a human nature. In an analogous way, we can understand the authorship of the Bible.
- It was written by humans in particular times and places, addressing particular issues. It is equally true that the Bible was written by God – the human authors were inspired – with a transcending purpose for all time.
- Given the human authorship of Scripture, we must take seriously the historical context, theological perspective, and literal style of each author in our interpretation.
- Given the divine authorship of Scripture, we must take seriously its authority (it is the Word of God), necessity (it is essential for salvation and life), and sufficiency (it contains all we need to be right with God and live for Him).

Acts 1:16 – “Brothers, the Scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit spoke beforehand by the mouth of David...”

II Timothy 3:16-17 – “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness,¹⁷ that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work.”

II Peter 1:20-21 – “...no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation.²¹ For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.”

2. Scripture is the best interpreter of Scripture.

- While we should not minimize the hard work of biblical interpretation, we also must maintain the principle of Scripture's clarity.
- All believers can read and understand the Word of God. The message of the Bible is clear to those who have an open heart.
- However, we should also recognize that not all passages of the Bible are equally clear, and so less clear passages of Scripture should be interpreted by relying on more clear passages of Scripture.
- Individual parts of the Bible should always be understood in relationship to the whole.

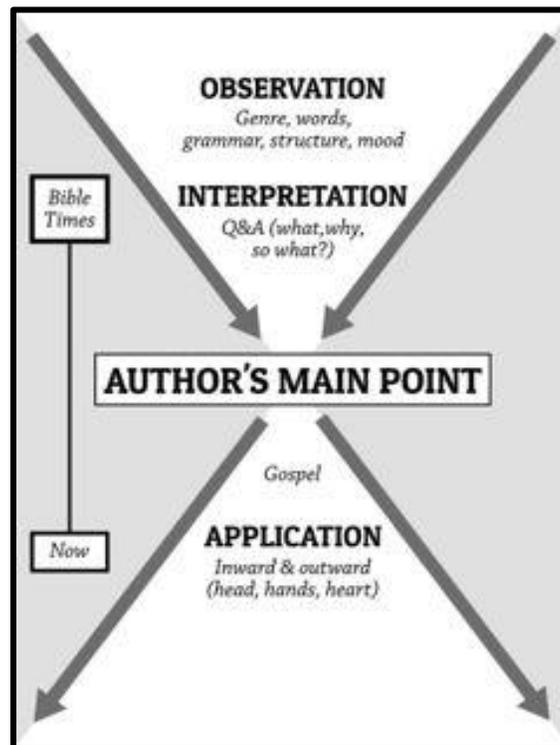
Psalm 119:130 – “The unfolding of your words gives light; it imparts understanding to the simple.”

Matthew 13:9-16 – “He who has ears, let him hear.”¹⁰ Then the disciples came and said to him, ‘Why do you speak to them in parables?’¹¹ And he answered them, ‘To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given.’”

II Peter 3:15-16 – “And count the patience of our Lord as salvation, just as our beloved brother Paul also wrote to you according to the wisdom given him,¹⁶ as he does in all his letters when he speaks in them of these matters. There are some things in them that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures.”

3. Follow the basic hermeneutic method of observe, interpret, apply.

- There are a vast numbers of books on hermeneutics (principles of biblical interpretation), but most include three basic components: 1) Observation: What does the text say? 2) Interpretation: What does the text mean? 3) Application: How should it affect my life?
- In our excitement to bring the Bible’s power to our personal life, we should never skip over the critical steps of observation and interpretation. We need to read it again for the first time.
- In observation, we need to slow down and notice how the passage is organized. Make an outline. We need to look for repeated words or themes.
- In interpretation, we need to take into account the historical context and the passage’s connection to the overall purpose of the book. What was the author’s main point?
- In application, we are ready to see how the original meaning relates to our contemporary context, and we can make powerful and accurate application of God’s Word to our personal life.



Taken from “Basic Bible Study Skills” by Peter Krol & Kenny Carrington. See www.knowableword.com.

4. Passages must be understood within their context.

- As indicated above, context is essential when it comes to biblical interpretation. We should be very careful of using a single verse to defend a point without understanding its original context.
- The best way to determine the meaning of a word in the Bible is to see how it is used in the sentence. We should also consider that different authors may use words differently.
- Each sentence must be interpreted in the context of its paragraph. Each paragraph must be understood in the larger framework of the overall purpose of the book.

Matthew 18:20 – *“For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them.”*

II Corinthians 10:5 – *“We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ...”*

5. Different literary genres must be interpreted differently.

- As with any piece of literature, the genre must affect how it is read and interpreted. The books of the Bible fall into four main categories: History, Poetry, Prophecy, and Epistle.
- History: When reading the historical books (both in the Old and New Testaments), we must keep in mind that while the authors recorded events that actually happened, they are telling the story with a purpose – to teach something about God and His redemption. In biblical history, we also need to discern in what way the story is descriptive (i.e. describing what happened) and in what way it is prescriptive (i.e. prescribing how we should live). (Consider I Samuel 17.)
- Poetry: When studying the poetic books (mostly Hebrew poetry in the Old Testament), we must consider how the frequent use of imagery, repetition, and parallelism (A, what’s more B) affects the meaning. (Consider Psalm 1.)
- Prophecy: The prophetic books (in the Old Testament and Revelation) should be studied in their historical context. While a prophecy may have a preliminary fulfillment in the events of history, this does not preclude final fulfillment in the work of the Messiah. Understanding this progressive nature of prophetic fulfillment means that all prophecy is in some sense Messianic. (Consider Habakkuk.)
- Epistle: When reading the genre of epistle (in the New Testament), we must remember that these letters were written to specific audiences dealing with specific circumstances (determining what they were helps with interpretation). In a real sense, we are both reading someone else’s mail and God’s Word to us. (Consider Paul’s letter to the Galatians.)

6. The Old Testament must be interpreted in light of fulfillment in Christ.

- It has been said, “The Old is in the New revealed; the New is in the Old concealed.” We cannot fully understand the New Testament without the Old Testament.
- Furthermore, the Old Testament is not just interesting history with some good moral lessons

thrown in. It doesn't just provide examples to follow or theology to believe. It is the story of God's people that reaches its climax in the death and resurrection of the Messiah.

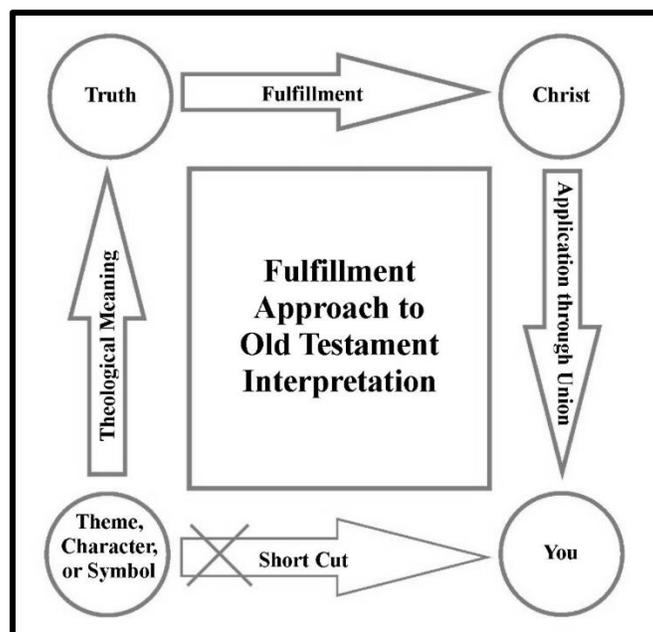
- We should follow the instruction and example of the New Testament authors and read the entire Old Testament in light of Christ.
- To do this, we must first identify the meaning behind the central themes, characters, and symbols of the Old Testament. Then, we must discover how they are fulfilled in Christ. Finally, we can unpack how these truths relate to us because we are in Christ. We should not take a shortcut from the passage to our lives without going through Christ!

Luke 24:25-27 – “And he said to them, ‘O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken!’²⁶ Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?’²⁷ And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.”

Luke 24:44-47 – “Then he said to them, ‘These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.’⁴⁵ Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures,⁴⁶ and said to them, ‘Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead...’”

Acts 26:22-23 – “To this day I have had the help that comes from God, and so I stand here testifying both to small and great, saying nothing but what the prophets and Moses said would come to pass:²³ that the Christ must suffer and that, by being the first to rise from the dead, he would proclaim light both to our people and to the Gentiles.” (see also Acts 3:22-24)

Romans 15:4 – “For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.” (see also Acts 3:22-24, I Corinthians 15:3-4, II Timothy 3:15, I Peter 1:10-12)



7. Scripture must be interpreted under the Spirit's guidance in the context of Christian community.

- The Bible must be studied with an open heart, eager for the guidance of the Holy Spirit.
- Additionally, we should not try to interpret and apply the Bible in isolation. We should seek to humbly learn from the generations of believers that have come before us and those in our own community.
- When, by God's grace, we properly read, study, interpret, and apply the Word of God, it can change our lives!

Luke 24:45 – *“Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures...”*

John 16:13 – *“When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come.”*

Acts 8:30-31 – *“So Philip ran to him and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet and asked, ‘Do you understand what you are reading?’³¹ And he said, ‘How can I, unless someone guides me?’ And he invited Philip to come up and sit with him.”*

Act 18:26 – *“He began to speak boldly in the synagogue, but when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him and explained to him the way of God more accurately.”*

I Corinthians 2:11-12 – *“For who knows a person's thoughts except the spirit of that person, which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God.¹² Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God.”*

III. Tools for Studying the Bible

Study Bible: There are many good study Bibles available. They can be a great tool to provide language help, historical background, and theological perspective. This can be a good way to do daily devotions. Make sure you read the top of the page before you read the bottom of the page! Consider the ESV Study Bible, Gospel Transformation Study Bible, or the Life Application Study Bible.

Dictionary: A simple dictionary can be very helpful with unfamiliar words and concepts.

Bible Dictionary: This resource provides helpful historical, cultural, geographical and biblical background for a host of topics (i.e. people, cities, terms, etc.)

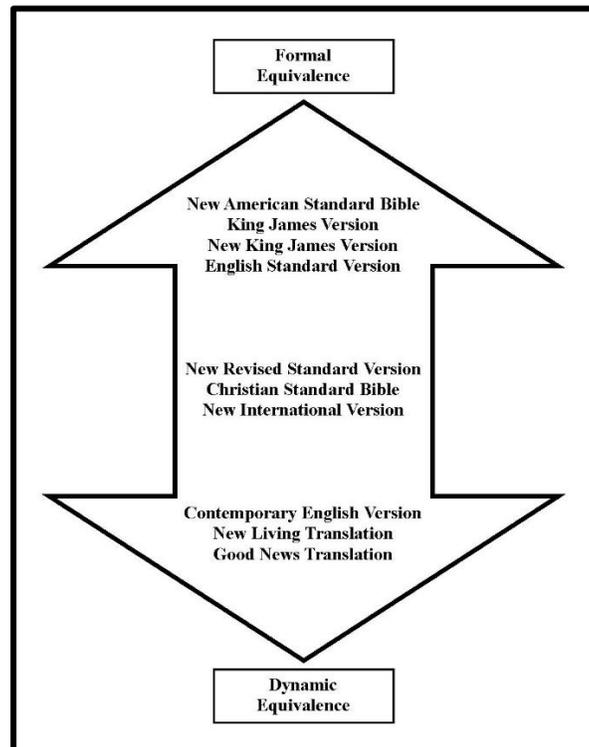
Commentaries: For more in depth study and teaching, commentaries pick-up where study Bibles leave off. Don't turn to a commentary too quickly. Make sure you study the passage first on your own. It is possible to rely too much on commentaries, but it is also possible to rely too little on them. If you have an interpretation for a passage that is not supported by any commentary, it is unlikely that you have discovered something no one else every has. Don't try to be original! Consider the Abridged Expositors Bible Commentary, Layman's Bible Commentary or the Tyndale Bible Commentary.

Various Translations: Having various translations available is a crucial tool. Remember the Old Testament was written in Hebrew and the New Testament in Greek. All modern translations are based on an "eclectic text" which is a compilation of the most accurate and reliable manuscripts. Every translation involves some interpretation. No translation gets it perfect all the time. There are two basic approaches to translation:

- **Formal Equivalence** – This word-for-word philosophy follows closely to the grammatical and vocabulary structures of the original language. It seeks to do less interpretation and puts more in the hands of the reader.
- **Dynamic Equivalence** – This thought-for-thought philosophy follows the referential structures, i.e. meaning and content. It seeks to give the reader more clarity and help in interpretation.

English Versions

- **King James Version** – word-for-word; 12th grade reading level; 54 translators; published in 1611.
- **New American Standard Bible** – word-for-word (revision of ASB); 11th grade reading level; 54 translators; published in 1971, updated in 1995.
- **Good News Translation** – dynamic equivalence; 6th grade reading; 7 translators; published in 1976.
- **New International Version** – balance between formal and dynamic; 8th grade reading level; 115 translators; published in 1978.
- **New King James Version** – word-for-word (update of KJV); 9th grade reading level; 119 translators; published in 1982.
- **New Revised Standard Version** – balance between formal and dynamic (liberal revision of RSV); 10th grade reading level; 30 translators; published in 1990.
- **Contemporary English Version** – dynamic equivalence; 5th grade reading level; over 100 translators; published in 1995.
- **New Living Translation** – dynamic equivalence (changed LT from a paraphrase); 6th grade reading level; 90 translators; published in 1996.
- **English Standard Version** – word-for-word (based-off RSV); 8th grade reading level; over 100 translators, published in 2001.
- **Christian Standard Bible** – optimal equivalence (update from the HCSB); 7th grade reading level; over 100 translators, published in 2017.



IV. Practice Studying the Bible

Personal Study: Observation

- Carefully read the section of the Bible you are studying making important Observations on the manuscript.
 - *Genre* – What is the genre (narrative, history, poetry, prophecy, letter, etc.)
 - *Structure* – How is the passage structured? What comes first? Last?
 - *Grammar* – Pay attention to grammar. What are the main subjects and verbs? What adjectives and descriptors are used?
 - *Repetition* – Are there any repeated words, concepts, or themes?
 - *Transitions* – Pay attention to transition words and connections (such as therefore, because, so that, etc.)
 - *Contrast* – Are there ideas that the reader is intended to compare and contrast? Are there opposites being represented?
- Use colored pencils to highlight repeated themes, underline important terms, draw arrows between related concepts, etc.
- Write down important Observations on the worksheet, and begin making some initial Interpretations.
- Put complicated words and concepts in your own terms. Look at different translations. Use a dictionary if needed.
- What unresolved questions do you have from this passage?

Small Group Discussion: Interpretation

- Review important Observations that you made in your personal study and work through Interpreting the meaning of the text. Continue marking up the manuscript and filling in the worksheet.
- Interpretation often starts with asking questions about your Observations. Why is a particular theme or word repeated? How do the important concepts relate together? What is the meaning of the specific vocabulary used? What was the author's purpose? Are there Old Testament passages being alluded to?
- Consider the literary context. Understand words as a part of the sentence. Understand sentences as a part of the paragraph. Understand paragraphs as a part of the larger section.
- Consider the historical context (author and audience): What assumptions has the author made? What was going on that caused this to be written? What is he addressing in the life of the first audience?
- Try to answer any questions people had in their personal study.
- Do your best to make all of your Interpretations based on the book of the Bible we are studying. While looking at other related passages in other parts of the Bible can provide background and reinforcement, sometimes it can actually skew your Interpretation of the author's meaning.

Large Group Discussion: Main Point

- Share some key Observations and Interpretations made at your table.
- What unresolved questions from the text did you have? Did other groups find any answers?
- Using the significant concepts we've seen, develop the Main Point of this section A Main Point is more than a summary. It explains not just what was said, but why.
- Write out the Main Point on your worksheet.

Small Group Discussion: Application

- Discuss how the Main Point should be applied to your life.
 - *Inward* – How does this passage apply to you personally? How is it calling you to become more like Christ?
 - *Outward* – How does this passage impact that way you interact with and influence those around you? How can you lead others to Christ?
- Look at different ways this passage can change you:
 - *Your Head* – How does this impact what you think and believe?
 - *Your Heart* – How does this impact your understanding of who you are (character, values, thoughts, priorities, identity, etc.)?
 - *Your Hands* – How does this impact what you do and say?
- Move beyond general principles to specific application in your relationships and circumstances.
- Don't forget to make Jesus a part of your application! How does the Gospel and God's grace impact what this passage is calling you to think, believe, change, or do? How does Jesus and his work fulfill this passage?
- Before you are done, spend a few minutes in prayer to ask God to make these changes in you.

	Inward	Outward
Head		
Heart		
Hands		

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