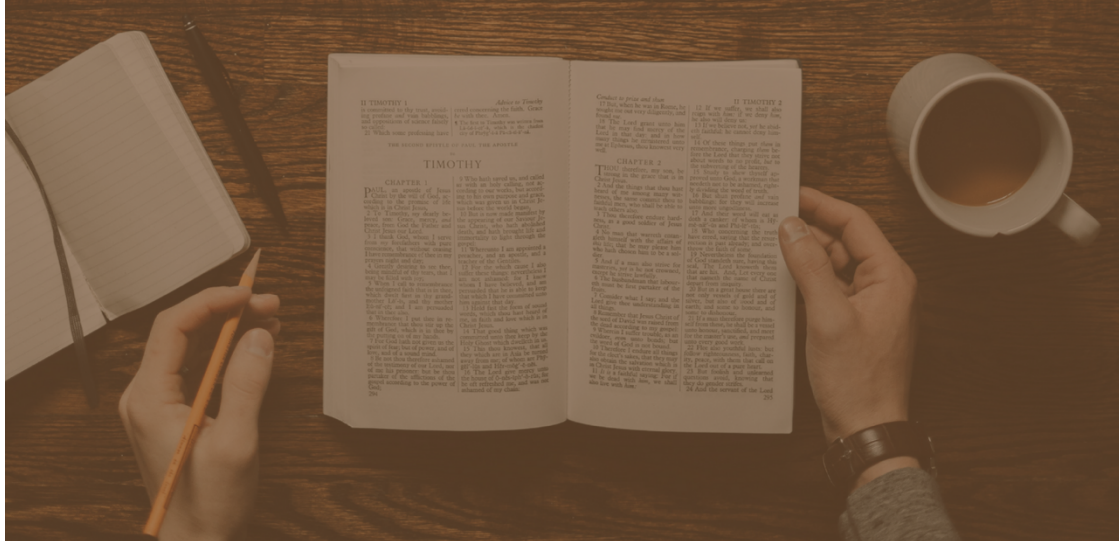




REDEEMER AIN

how to study THE BIBLE



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PRE-STUDY: MOTIVATION

THE NATURE OF THE BIBLE

The Bible is God's Word.

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 Peter 1:21)

The Bible is true.

The sum of your word is truth, and every one of your righteous rules endures forever. (Psalm 119:160)

The Bible is sufficient.

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. (2 Timothy 3:16–17)

The Bible is necessary.

And he humbled you and let you hunger and fed you with manna, which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that he might make you know that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord. (Deuteronomy 8:3)

The Bible is authoritative.

18 And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” (Matthew 28:18–20)

The Bible is clear.

The unfolding of your words gives light; it imparts understanding to the simple. (Psalm 119:130)

The Bible is about Jesus.

25 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 24:25–27)

WHY SHOULD WE STUDY THE BIBLE?

1. The Bible is how we come to know who God is.

We can’t know who God is fully apart from the Bible. The Bible is God’s revelation to us of himself.

2. The Bible is how we come to know who we are.

The Bible instructs our understanding of who we are, as well as who God is. The Bible teaches about the dignity of life, the sinful nature of man, the need for salvation and the new birth, the eternity of the soul, the resurrection of the body, and so on.

3. The Bible is how we primarily hear from God.

We call the Bible “God’s Word” for a reason—it is what God has chosen to reveal in a special way to all people. Seeking to “listen to God” without first turning to the Bible is like waiting to receive a WhatsApp from your friend without turning on your phone.

4. The Bible is how we commune with God.

The Bible is not passive but is “living and active” (Heb. 4:12). This means that when we read the Bible in faith, we are through the indwelling Spirit communing—that is, having fellowship—with God. We abide with Christ by abiding in his Word (John 8:31).

5. The Bible is how we learn to grow in holiness.

The Bible shapes our view of sanctification: both in providing commands and the power to keep the commands of growth in godliness.

STEP 1: CONTEXT

INTRODUCING CONTEXT

In order to properly understand the Bible, we need to recognize the *context of the passage*. The context of the passage is the surrounding circumstances or argument of the passage.

For example what if you were reading the Bible and claimed this passage?

If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours.

Great! For those who worship God, all will be theirs! But the surrounding context gives out the meaning of the passage:

5 And the devil took him up and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time, 6 and said to him, "To you I will give all this authority and their glory, for it has been delivered to me, and I give it to whom I will. 7 If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours." (Luke 4:5–7)

This isn't a promise that God makes—it's a promise that *Satan makes*. The context of the passage shows us who is speaking (Satan) which completely changes our interpretation.

Or again, how many times has this passage been quoted in anticipation of great things about to be done?

Look among the nations, and see; wonder and be astounded. For I am doing a work in your days that you would not believe if told.

God is doing work that you would not believe! Amazing! But the surrounding context tells us what that great work is:

5 "Look among the nations, and see; wonder and be astounded. For I am doing a work in your days that you would not believe if told. 6 For behold, I am raising up the Chaldeans, that bitter and hasty nation, who march through the breadth of the earth, to seize dwellings not their own. (Habakkuk 1:5–6)

The unbelievable work is that God is going to use the wicked Chaldeans to discipline his covenant people! Without the context we would completely missed the point.

Or finally, one of the most misused promises in the Bible:

For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.

God has plans of prosperity and welfare for his people. But the context shows us that this welfare will only happen *after seventy years of exile*. The people receiving this promise had to go through exile first, which means it's not a blanket statement of prosperity at all times.

10 "For thus says the Lord: When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will visit you, and I will fulfill to you my promise and bring you back to this place. 11 For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope. (Jeremiah 29:10–11)

HOW DO WE FIND THE CONTEXT?

There a number of different types of context that we should look for when studying the Bible.

Literary Context

- What is the genre of the passage (ex. poetry, narrative, epistle, apocalyptic)?
- What comes immediately before and immediately after this passage?

Historical Context

- What are the historical circumstances that were present when this passage was written?

Redemptive/Covenantal Context

- What stage of redemption does this passage take place in (ex. OT or NT)?
- What covenant is in effect when this passage was written?

Each one of these “contexts” is going to help set us up to better interpret the Bible in the rest of our study of Scripture.

STEP 2: OBSERVATIONS

INTRODUCING OBSERVATION

After we've established the context for the passage that we are studying, we want to begin reading the passage carefully in order to *observe what is there*. Often, we jump right into answering our questions without first carefully reading and observing what the text says. This is dangerous because we can often bring our already held presuppositions or other background knowledge to the text and *read into the text* what we already believe rather *reading out of the text* what is actually written.

In observation we want to *look, look, and look* before we jump to our interpretation or our conclusions. This requires holding off on rushing to interpretation until we have spent time simply reading carefully the passage.

OBSERVATION QUESTIONS

- What words or phrases stick out?
- Are there any key *grammatical* words in this passage (because, therefore, in order to, etc.) that seem important to the flow of thought?
- What themes seem to be significant?
- Is there anything confusing or surprising?
- What questions do you have from this passage?

STEP 3: MEANING

INTRODUCING MEANING

After we've spent time looking at the passage and making observations, we're in a place to begin interpreting the passage and finding the *meaning* of the passage. When we look for meaning we are looking for what the author *intended* in the passage. We don't import our own meaning to the text but rather we *draw meaning out* of the text by understanding what the biblical authors intended as they were writing.

There are a couple of general ways that we can find meaning: *asking questions* and *using tools*.

ASKING QUESTIONS

So much of our Bible study is simply going to be shaped by asking questions about the text and trying to answer these questions from the text. We want to be able to demonstrate from the text the answer to these questions (this is why careful observation and reading done in *Step 2* is so important).

There are a handful of "standard questions" that we can ask pretty much any passage in the Bible that we come to:

- What does this passage teach us about God?
- How does this passage relate to the person or work of Christ?
- What does this passage teach us about ourselves?
- What other Scriptures come to mind with this passage?
- How would you summarize the main point of the passage?

In addition to these “standard questions” we can also begin to answer the specific questions that were raised from the passage during the “observation” stage of Bible study.

Ex. Specific questions from 1 Peter 1:3–9:

- How does one become “born again” to this living hope?
- How can believers have assurance of their future hope?
- What does it mean that it we are grieved “if necessary” by various trials?

USING TOOLS

Sometimes we still need help to be able to draw out the meaning in the text. We should always start by looking at the passage ourselves so as to grow in our ability to read and interpret the Bible on our own, but by God’s grace there are a number of tools that we can use to either confirm or inform our interpretation of a particular passage.

Exegetical Tools:

- **Cross-references** — Many Bibles have cross-references already in them. These are other passages of Scripture that the Bible publishers think are relevant to a particular passage because of direct citations or similar themes. If you’re Bible doesn’t have cross-references they are easily available using different Bible apps or websites (ex. biblegateway.com).
- **Other translations** — The Bible was written in Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek. Any translation of the original languages is going to have some interpretative decisions. We can get a

fuller understanding of a passage by looking at different translations to get a better sense of how other interpreters thought about the passage.

- **Word studies** — There are a number of tools available to look up how other words appear in different parts of Scripture. Something like *Strong's Concordance* or even the concordance on the back of your Bible can be a helpful way to see what a particular word might mean in other parts of Scripture.

Interpretation Tools:

- **Study Bibles** — Study Bibles are Bibles with running commentary to help understand the passage of Scripture. These can be great ways to better understand the meaning of the text. Because they are someone else's interpretation, however, they are not as authoritative as Scripture and should be viewed as “an answer” rather than “the answer.” Some good and available English study Bibles are *The ESV Study Bible* and *The Reformation Study Bible*.
- **Commentaries** — Commentaries are books written specifically to help people interpret a particular book or passage in the Bible. Like study Bibles, these comments are “an answer” so we should usually read multiple commentaries on a particular passage. Some good commentaries are the *Tyndale Old and New Testament Commentaries* (TOTC and TNTC) and *Matthew Henry's Concise Commentary on the Whole Bible*.

STEP 4: APPLICATION

Bible study stops short if it stays in the realm of “information” and does not move towards practical application as we become more conformed to the image of Christ. We see in 2 Timothy that the Bible is meant to equip us for every good work:

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. (2 Timothy 3:16–17)

We read the Bible not merely to learn but to be *trained in righteousness and equipped for every good work*. So, application is essential to the Bible study process. It is where the truth of God’s Word comes to bear upon the lives of God’s people.

APPLICATION QUESTIONS

While each passage will have its own unique set of applications, there are some standard questions that we can ask any text and learn to apply truth to our lives.

- How does this passage challenge or encourage my thinking?
- How does this passage challenge or encourage the way that I am living?
- Is there any sin that this passage reveals in my own heart?
- What from this passage could I use to encourage a believer or share with a non-believer?

APPLICATION ACTIONS

Sometimes there are some standard ways that we can take the text and apply it to our lives right then and there.

- **Pray over the text** — We can pray over the passage and pray in light of the passage. As we pray, draw out truths about God and turn them into specific prayers of praise. We can ask help from God to be able to properly obey what is commanded in the passage. We can thank God for the good news and promises that he gives us in the passage.
- **Memorize a portion of the passage** — We can also memorize a portion of the passage to be able to meditate upon throughout the day. This can be a short phrase or verse or it can be a lengthier paragraph. As we meditate upon the passage, we may find ways that it helps us in the fight of faith.

PUTTING IT TOGETHER: 1 PETER 1:3–9

³ Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴ to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, ⁵ who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. ⁶ In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, ⁷ so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. ⁸ Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, ⁹ obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

CONTEXT

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PUTTING IT TOGETHER: PSALM 19

- 1 The heavens declare the glory of God,
and the sky above proclaims his handiwork.
- 2 Day to day pours out speech,
and night to night reveals knowledge.
- 3 There is no speech, nor are there words,
whose voice is not heard.
- 4 Their voice goes out through all the earth,
and their words to the end of the world.
In them he has set a tent for the sun,
5 which comes out like a bridegroom leaving his chamber,
and, like a strong man, runs its course with joy.
- 6 Its rising is from the end of the heavens,
and its circuit to the end of them,
and there is nothing hidden from its heat.

- 7 The law of the LORD is perfect,
reviving the soul;
the testimony of the LORD is sure,
making wise the simple;
- 8 the precepts of the LORD are right,
rejoicing the heart;
the commandment of the LORD is pure,
enlightening the eyes;
- 9 the fear of the LORD is clean,
enduring forever;
the rules of the LORD are true,
and righteous altogether.
- 10 More to be desired are they than gold,
even much fine gold;
sweeter also than honey
and drippings of the honeycomb.
- 11 Moreover, by them is your servant warned;

in keeping them there is great reward.

- ¹² Who can discern his errors?
Declare me innocent from hidden faults.
- ¹³ Keep back your servant also from presumptuous sins;
let them not have dominion over me!
Then I shall be blameless,
and innocent of great transgression.
- ¹⁴ Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart
be acceptable in your sight,
O LORD, my rock and my redeemer.
-

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*** Material for this booklet was adapted from **One to One Bible Reading** by David Helm and material created in 2016 by Luke Humphrey and Eric Swanson for College Park Church, Indianapolis, IN.*

