

Observation, Interpretation, Application Method

What does getting in God's Word together look like?

Paul told Timothy (his disciple!) to "present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth." (2 Timothy 2:15). So how can we "rightly handle" God's Word?

Begin with prayer! Ask God to do what we can't! (The following are four helpful prayers to read before reading the Bible - <https://www.desiringgod.org/interviews/how-do-i-pray-the-bible>)

- Incline my heart to you, not to prideful gain or any false motive. (Psalm 119:36)
- Open my eyes to behold wonderful things in your Word. (Psalm 119:18)
- Unite my heart to fear your name. (Psalm 86:11)
- Satisfy me with your steadfast love. (Psalm 90:14)

Three Steps to Studying the Bible:

- 1) Observation: What does it say? (What is the passage talking about?)
 - General Observation: First, simply observe what the text is saying. You're a journalist here, gathering information. So ask the following questions:
 - Who? Who is speaking? Who is the audience? Who are the main characters?
 - What? What is the main theme or topic of the passage? What event is taking place? What is happening?
 - Where? Where did or will this happen? Where was it said? (Geography, location)
 - When? When did or will this happen? When was it said? (What time period, what else was happening at that time)
 - Why? Why did or will this happen? Why was it said? (Cause and effect)
 - How? How did or will this happen? How was it said? (Mood, tone, emotion)
 - Grammar – I know, I know, you thought you were out of school. But basic grammatical rules and observations are huge to rightly dividing God's Word!
 - Cause and effect – Look for key words like "because", "therefore", "but" or "so" and connect the dots!
 - Parts of Speech
 - Nouns: Who is the subject? Who or what is the object?
 - Verbs: What's the action taking place, who's doing it and who's it being done to? How's it being done? (adverbs)
 - Adjectives: How did the author describe the people, things or events?
 - Prepositions: Often important in connecting ideas – *through*, *into*, *in*, *to*
 - Genre – The literary style will change *how* you read passage. This is very important to note.
 - Narrative – Narratives (stories) are primarily descriptive, not prescriptive. They are telling you *what* happened or will happen, not necessarily directly informing you on what to do in your own life.
 - Poetry – Poetry will use a lot of figurative language (similes, metaphors, exaggeration, parallelism). Poetry should not be read as literally as other genres.
 - Prophecy – Prophecy can be one of the most challenging genres of the Bible! Often a prophecy can be referring to several events (double prophecy), one in the more immediate context and one that will occur later on. Figurative language is often used here as well.
 - Letter – A letter was written from a specific author to a specific audience for a specific reason. It wasn't written to you (You're reading someone else's mail, peering over their shoulder!). Imagine someone discovering a love letter you wrote, a grocery list you dropped, or instructions. Context matters!

- 2) Interpretation: What does it mean? (What does the passage say about what it's talking about?)
 - AIM – Author's Intended Meaning
 - One of the most important keys to interpretation is discovering the author's intended meaning (AIM). Every author had one, and if we don't discover it, we will misinterpret the passage or book!
 - Why did they write what they wrote? What's the one main idea they were trying to convey? What's the purpose of the passage or book?
 - Context
 - Context is king! A lot of wrong interpretation comes from ripping individual verses out of their context, making them say whatever we want, which leads to misapplication.
 - Read every word in light of its sentence. Read every sentence in light of its paragraph. Read every paragraph (or chapter) in light of the whole book. Read every book in light of the rest of the Bible!
 - After reading the Bible for yourself, use some study helps to gain important information like cultural, geographic and historical context. See "Suggested Resources for Studying the Bible" below. (Important: don't just rush to commentaries, learn to read it for yourself first!)
 - Cross-Referencing
 - A cross-reference is another passage in the Bible that supports, illumines or amplifies the passage you are studying.
 - Many Bibles have cross-references on the margins or bottom of the pages.
 - This is a very important aspect of studying the Bible. The Bible will never contradict itself. So comparing similar passages will help us better understand the idea we are studying.
 - Interpret Scripture with other Scripture
 - If you are reading a passage that is difficult to understand, compare it to other passages on similar subjects that are easier to understand.
 - Let the clearer passages help explain the more difficult passages!
 - Compare translations – Some good word-for-word translations are the ESV and NASB. Some good phrase-by-phrase translations are the NLT and NIV. The CSB is a good mix of both.
 - Summarize your conclusions:
 - Does your interpretation fit with the general theme of the book?
 - Does it fit with the context of the sentence, paragraph, book and rest of the Bible?
 - Does it fit with other things the same author said in other books?
 - Does it agree with other biblical truth?
 - Does God's Word say it, or is it just my idea I'm trying to read into the text?
- 3) Application: What does it mean for me? (What am I going to do about what the passage is saying?)
 - Don't start with step three! You cannot make correct application without first making correct observations and interpretation.
 - Having said that, don't stop with steps one and two! Without application, the first two are pointless. We must be hearers of the words, not just doers! (James 1.22-25)
 - Ask the Holy Spirit to do what only He can do (John 16.7-15) and what God promises the Word will do! 2 Timothy 3.16-17
 - Ask yourself the following questions:
 - Is there a **sin** to confess or avoid?
 - Is there a **promise** to claim?
 - Is there an **example** to follow?
 - Is there a **command** to obey?
 - Is there something to be **thankful** for?
 - Is there something to learn (and praise) about **God**?
 - Is there a way this points me to **Jesus**? (Every text, read correctly, will!)
 - Is there an action to take? A thought or belief or attitude to correct?
 - Don't forget – the point of reading the Bible is to know God through Jesus! (John 5.39) Without that, Bible reading is just head knowledge that puffs up (1 Corinthians 8.1), or outward conformity without heart change. (Matthew 15.7-8, 23.27-28)

