



HOW TO READ THE BIBLE

INTRODUCTION

Hey everybody! You're reading this because you want to grow in your study of the Word of God. You want to know how to read the Bible, how to read it correctly, and how to interpret it correctly. It's impossible to grow your relationship with Jesus without reading the Word of God. It is essential.

Jesus says to the Pharisees, "You search the scriptures because you think in them they have life, but really they bear witness of me." What's he saying there? That ultimately the goal of reading the Word is to grow in Jesus Christ, to see Him, and to know Him.

I want to encourage you today to start reading the Word of God. And you might say, "Where do I start?" Well, if you're new at this, if you're new to this Bible, this group of 66 books collated together, "Where do I start?"

I would encourage you to start with the gospel of John. It will tell you about who Jesus is, as both the Son of Man and the Son of God.

The second book I would recommend is the gospel of Mark. It's really short, succinct stories of what Jesus did on earth for us, for me, and for you.

Thirdly, I'd encourage you to start with the book of Ephesians. It's only six chapters. The first three chapters will tell you about who you are in Christ and the second half of that book will tell you how to walk that out.

These are three really great books to start with. After reading through those, you can venture out into Genesis and unpack some of the Old Testament literature, Psalms, Proverbs, poetry, etc. The Old Testament will help you to begin to really understand our perfect relationship with God in the beginning, how sin disintegrated that perfect relationship, and then God's journey to redeem man, us, back unto Himself.

So my encouragement to you... simply start.

Once you do, you'll find that some things will be really plain to understand, while other things will need further study, resources, and revelation from the Holy Spirit.

But the most important thing is to go on the journey, not just for knowledge sake, but to find intimacy in relationship with the Author and the Architect of the Scriptures and the person of Jesus Christ. You want to abide in Him and Him in you, and ultimately, bring Glory to God. That's why we read the Word of God.

So I want to encourage you today to dive deep. I pray that your journey with Him as you go through this study grows exponentially and that you fall more in love with Him as you read His words of life.



OBSERVATION

As we start, as we dive into this study, I'm going to give you four words that are going to describe how to read the Bible better. Four large words and then four smaller words. It's really simple to learn.

The first word is **Observation**. And attached to that word is the word **Them**. **Observation** relates to **Them**. What do I mean by that? Them is the ancient culture of that time. Them is the ancient people of that time.

This is the first principle in what's called Hermeneutics (a fancy word for interpretation, the science of how we read and study the Bible). The first principle of interpretation: what is the true meaning of the text (**The true meaning of the text is always what the author always intended for the ancient people/culture**). That is how we define the true meaning of the text. That is the place in which we start.

Look at the word observation. What we are simply doing is looking at and learning about the environment we're placing ourselves in. Imagine we're visiting a family in a different country and they've invited us into their home. The proper thing to do, being in a new different culture, is to watch and learn about the interactions and behaviors of the people who live there. For instance, in India, showing someone the bottom of your shoes equates to giving that person the middle finger here in the states. Imagine not knowing this, visiting someone in their home, and then kicking your feet up on their sofa or coffee table.

This is what we're doing when we observe the text. When I come to reading the Bible, first of all, I'm just reading it. I'm not looking for deep meaning. I'm not looking for the underlying layers. And I'm reading slowly. This is what monastic monks did in the 5th and 6th century. It was known as **Lectio Divina**. They would simply read and meditate and pray slowly. They would observe the text, letting it wash over them, letting the observance of the Scriptures fill their minds and fill their hearts.

So I encourage you to do that first. Observe what is happening in the ancient texts. Take notes. Highlight. Mark it up. Write it down.

After this stage, you may want to go a bit further and read through the scripture, passage, chapter, or chapters three, four, five times. There's power in letting scripture wash over you over and over again.

After you've read through the Scripture passage several times, you may want to underline, highlight, or circle. You can begin to look at the grammar of the text. Look at verbs, nouns, pronouns, adjectives, conjunctions, causes and effects. You can look at figures of speech, metaphors, things that stand out, repetitive words or phrases. Take notes.

This is the first step of studying the Scriptures.

See.

Look.

Observe. And let it wash over you.



INTERPRETATION

So we've learned about the observation stage. The stage where we're letting the Scripture wash over us over and over again. We're noting things that stand out, things that are unique, maybe just noting the text that we don't understand. We've looked at verbs, nouns, adjectives, contrasts, lists, repeats. There's a lot you can do in this area.

After **observing them** as the ancient people, the second step is **interpretation**. **Interpretation** deals with **us, us** in the 21st century. Here we're trying to break down the divide. How big is that road, how big is that river between **them** and **us**. This is where we start to discover the historical and literary context of what we're reading. These two things are really important. If we can know something of the historical context it's going to help us immensely. You don't have to be a historian. You don't have to know everything. You don't have to know Hebrew or Greek. Thankfully, people have done this for us. We can explore commentaries, dictionaries, and other resources to help us fill in these gaps.

Historical and literary context is really important in helping us understand the genres (type of book), when the book was written, who the author was, and who the audience is. Whoever it is that the author is writing to or talking about is going to help us understand the context and help us interpret the Word of God into our situation today. Historical context and literary context.

The Bible is a piece of literature that has many genres: prophecy, wisdom, epistles (letters), revelatory (apocalyptic). There are so many different genres within the Bible. If we can know what type of book we're reading, it's going to help us immensely in the way that we approach reading and studying. For instance, I'm going to read through a recipe for an apple pie a lot different than how I would read through a sci-fi novel. It helps to know that what I'm reading in the Song of Solomon, or Psalms, or any poetic literature is going to be very different from the book of Chronicles which is very historical and narrative, or the book of Revelation which is very symbolic, but also literal. This is what it means to have some basic understanding of literary context.

Historical and literary context. What does it mean for them? Jesus in Mark 9 is talking about sin. "And if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out. It is better for you to enter the Kingdom of God with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into Hell..." (Mark 9:47 ESV) Now if we don't understand the literary context or the device in which Jesus is using there, we may end up doing just that. I don't encourage you to cut off your hand or pluck out your eye. This is what is known as **hyperbolic language**. He's trying to exaggerate a point. It's a common literary device known in those times. Understanding what is metaphorical and what is literal is hugely important when it comes to interpreting the Scriptures.

Bit by bit you'll learn how to see these historical and literary devices and contexts with the help of the Holy Spirit and with the help of commentators, dictionaries, etc. Continue on this journey of interpretation, working to bridge this gap between **them** and **us**. Continue to dive deep into the Word of God.



CORRELATION

So we've done step number one: **observe** the text, what it means to **them** (ancient culture, ancient people). Then in step number two, we've **interpreted** the text for **us** in the 21st century. We've bridged the gap between **them** and **us**.

The third step is **correlation**. How does it **correlate** to **them** and **us**? The word to use here is **all. Them. Us. All. Everybody**. How does this text transcend time? How does this theologize the ancient culture and our modern day times? What are the principles that relate and connect and are meaningful for both them and us?

The book of Malachi is a prophetic book that speaks of the ancient culture of Israel is desolation. The temple is destroyed. The city is in ruin. The priests and the Levites aren't doing what they should be doing in their forms of worship, going to the temple, their duties, etc. They had set all these aside and began living life for themselves. They were, many, living in the bondages of sin and so they had forgotten many of the ways in which God had instructed them.

What is the theological principle that helps us today? How does that **correlate** to us?

Well, we don't have a temple. We don't sacrifice animals. We're not priests dressed in robes. We don't have the same forms of worship (lighting the lamps, putting out the show bread, etc). What do we have? We do have the body of believers. We do have the Church. We do have the ability to worship God. We do have the ability to put Him first. We do have the ability to have His presence in our lives. This is how we break down them and us.

Step number three in this process: **correlation** (what it means to **all**). We are simply and basically discovering the theological principle that connects the ancient to us and to everybody. We can worship. We can put Christ at the center of our lives. We can restore our worship and put Him first in our family and our finances. We can not neglect these things that God has called us to do.

That is a simple theologizing, connecting the ancient to us today. It's what bridges the original meaning of the text. In other words, it's a timeless principle that transcends ancient and modern culture.

Restore. Return to your first love. Put God (His presence, His word, His truth) at the center of your family, of your own life, of your business, of your finances. Return to worshipping Him in the fullest sense of what that means. That is theologizing. What we've done is **correlate** the ancient text to modern times.

This is step number three: what it means to **all** of us.



APPLICATION

Alright, we've done three steps: **observation, interpretation, correlation. Them. Us. All.**

The fourth step is **application**. This is what it means to **me**, to **you**. How do we apply it? We have all this knowledge, all this information, and all these interpretive methods, but if we don't apply the text it is mere knowledge. If we don't take what we've learned and put it into practice, we've wasted our time.

We don't just want information. What we want is transformation. What we want is revelation. And this is where the role of the Holy Spirit helps us. The Holy Spirit breathed the Word of God. He gave us the Word of God through human authors so it would be written down. So when we read the Word of God, we are getting the help of the Holy Spirit who is illuminating the text as we read. And then He's also helping us apply the Word of God at the same time.

An unbeliever can do all the same interpretation steps. They can break down the text grammatically, historically, and literally. But this where it becomes revelation. This is where the person of the Holy Spirit in your prayer, in your reading, in your devotion, in your meditating the Word of God brings it to life. This is where the Holy Spirit brings that theological principle into your heart and into action.

Make this step specific and make it personal. Write it in a journal. Type it out in your phone. This is the time to take the text and write down what it means to you. You're saying "Come Holy Spirit, guide me, lead me, teach me, show me. Help me put you first today in my thought life, in my family." Whatever that theological truth is that has been revealed to you through the Scriptures, write it down and ask the Holy Spirit to make it truth for you in your life. Be mindful to thank the Holy Spirit for revealing and illuminating these ancient texts and ancient principles to you that are relevant, that are real, that are true, and that can help you today.



SUMMARY

We've learned four steps in how to read or study the Bible: How to **observe** the text (what it means to **them** in an ancient culture), what it means to **interpret** the text for **us** in the 21st century (bridging the gap or the divide), how to **correlate** the text (what does it mean for **everyone** or for **all**, what is the biblical truth that transcends time), and lastly, how do we **apply** the truth to us **personally**, how does this apply to **me** today.

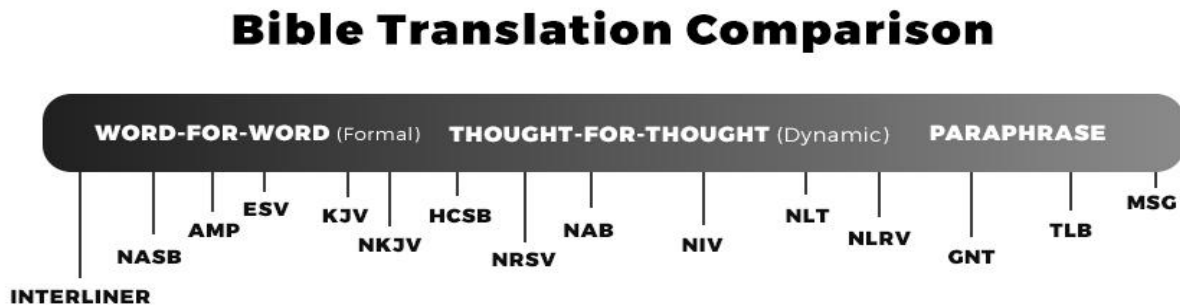
These are the four steps of understanding/reading/studying the Word of God that's going to help you immensely as you dive in.



HELPFUL RESOURCES

You may have some questions after learning these four steps. What do I read? What Bible translation? Who do I trust? All great questions.

Start with multiple translations. There are two basic schools of translation with the biblical text: word-for-word and thought-for-thought (or formal transition vs functional/dynamic translation).



It's good practice to have a Bible from each of these basic groups.

Formal translation (Word-For-Word) recommendations: ESV, NASB, NRSV

Dynamic translation (Thought-For-Thought) recommendations: NLT, NIV, NKJV

Paraphrase (Modern day language): The Message Bible

I would also recommend you get a good Bible commentary. Commentaries provide you with historical and literary context. A good commentary is going to help your Bible reading immensely. You will eliminate 75% of misinterpretations if you've got good historical and literary context.

Next is a good Bible dictionary. It's going to take the ancient language and help you understand it in modern terms.

Last recommendation if you're wanting to go a little bit deeper in your Word, is to get a good concordance. A concordance is a big book that takes every word of the Bible and gives a number, definition, and background. It tells you how many times that word was used throughout Scripture and how it was used. This helps you with context.

Remember that you find wisdom in a multitude of counselors. Don't find yourself stuck on a tangent of one particular author. Keep your study guides (translations, commentaries, dictionaries, concordances) diverse. And while all these guides are extremely helpful, remember it is the counsel of the Holy Spirit that brings true revelation.

