

## How to Study the Bible

***I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect. (Romans 12:1-2) ESV***

We can read the Bible devotionally. We can do read-through-the-bible-in-a-year plans. We can turn to a particular passage of Scripture and be edified by it. All of these are good and can be beneficial. God, through the Spirit, works through these in our lives as Christians to transform us into the image of His Son. We should do all we can to get God's Word into our minds and hearts. An indispensable practice in the Christian life is proper study of the Scriptures, which is what we are looking at today.

The art and science of interpretation of the Bible is called "hermeneutics." And while today's lesson includes concepts of hermeneutics, it isn't a comprehensive discussion on hermeneutics. That would take several weeks. Hopefully, this whets your appetite to further read, study and understand what God has to say to us in His Word.

God's Word, the Bible, comes to us in human language, through human culture, time, and human contexts and we must first understand God's Word by reading it within the particular cultures and contexts in which it was given to most fully and faithfully understand before we apply it to our lives today.

### Why Is Bible Interpretation Important?

While understanding and quoting various bible verses can be helpful and edifying, we must go beyond to attempt to understand the bible and its various books, passages and themes in their original context to understand what God intends for us to ***mine from*** of His Word today.

From Roy B. Zuck's Basic Bible Interpretation:

*"It Is Essential for Understanding and Teaching the Bible Properly.*

*We must know the meaning of the Bible before we can know its message for today. We must understand its sense for then before we can see its significance for now. Without hermeneutics (the science and art of interpreting the Bible) we are jumping over and missing out on an indispensable step in Bible study. The first step, **observation**, asks, What does it say? The second step, **interpretation**, asks the question, What does it mean? The third step, **application**, raises the question, How does it apply to me?"*

In other words, the better we understand the human author's original intent, which is dependent upon the cultural, biblical, redemptive historical contexts in which it was written, the better and more faithfully we can understand what God intends for us today and apply it to our own lives in our own contexts.

## Presuppositions

We all have presuppositions when we come to the Word of God. Since you are all in this class and since we have been going through an OT Survey for the past year-plus, I am going to presuppose that we all share at least a few presuppositions, which I will talk about briefly here. A presupposition is something that you understand to be true before you start something. A synonym would be an assumption.

### I. The Bible Is God's Word

The first presupposition I want to talk about is the presupposition that we hold that the Bible is God's Word. This is something we take as a given as bible believing Christians - as those who believe the Bible is God's Word, we take it as a given that the Bible is God's very words. We can say this all day long, but what does that mean that the Bible is God's Word? Let's look at two aspects of that.

#### A. The Bible Is Inspired by God.

The first is the inspiration of Scripture, that the Bible is inspired by God. This is claimed implicitly and explicitly throughout Scripture, the Old Testament carries a constant sense throughout that this is the Lord's word - **"the Lord says,"** - the prophets frequently say that. The New Testament has the stamp of apostolic authority. We can see these various Old Testament citations in the New.

Acts 2:16-17a citing Joel 2:28-32 says, ***"But this is what was uttered through the prophet Joel: "And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh..."*** So, in Acts 2 Peter cites Joel 2 and he cites it as something spoken by the prophets of the Old Testament as given by the prophet.

And if we look at Hebrews 3:7 citing Psalm 95 the writer of Hebrews says, ***"Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says, "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion..."*** Who does Hebrews 3:7 say spoke in the Old Testament? It was the Holy Spirit.

We can get an overall clear view of inspiration in Acts 4:25 citing Psalm 2:1 it says, ***"who through the mouth of our father David, your servant, said by the Holy Spirit, "Why did the Gentiles rage, and the peoples plot in vain?"*** Acts 4:25 is emphatic that it was the Lord speaking by means of the Holy Spirit through the the spokesperson, that is, David. So, we can see that Scripture is God's Word given by his Holy Spirit spoken by the human author. So, inspiration, the inspiration of God's Word, is claimed **implicitly** throughout Scripture.

It is also claimed **explicitly**, one of the key texts for the inspiration of Scripture is 2 Timothy 3:16-17 where it says, ***"All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work."*** The English words *"breathed out by God"* is a Greek

compound word *theopneustos* which may have been coined by Paul himself. It means God exhaled or God breathed out his word.

How did God do that? Scripture does not tell us exactly how God did it, but we do know that this is God's Word by virtue of his divine inspiration. 2 Peter 1:21 gives us a hint of how God did it. It says, ***“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.”*** God moved individuals to speak the message that he wished to deliver – that is every word.

Now I would like to make an important clarification here; this does not mean dictation. In other words, the human authors weren't merely like typewriters. How do we know that God's Word was not given, for the most part, through dictation? Well, the answer to that question is that the different writers of the Old Testament and the New Testament have different styles, their personalities come out, their style of writing or speaking comes out and so we see that there is *a human dimension in inspiration*.

If all of Scripture was simply dictated by the Holy Spirit to human authors, we would expect it to have a uniform style. But since we see the human authors' personalities and vocabulary and grammar, coming through in the Scripture that they write we see that this is not simply dictated. That is the first thing we mean by the Bible is God's Word. Therefore, we can be confident that all the words in their original languages in both the Old and New Testaments are inspired by the Holy Spirit and intended to be there.

From the ESV Study Bible, *All Scripture is witness to God, given by divinely illuminated human writers, and all Scripture is God witnessing to himself in and through their words. The way into the mind of God is through the expressed mind of these human writers, so the reader of the Bible looks for that characteristic first. But the text must be read, or reread, as God's own self-revelatory instruction, given in the form of this human testimony. In this way God tells the reader the truth about himself; his work past, present, and future; and his will for people's lives.*

## **B. The Authority of Scripture**

The second thing we mean by the Bible is God's Word is not just its **inspiration** as Scripture but its **authority** as Scripture. When we say Scripture is authoritative, what do we mean? ***We mean that Scripture, because it is the revealed words of God, has claim over our life and that we submit ourselves to it's authority.***

### **1. Scripture Over Personal Experience**

Three aspects of authority – we can see that Scripture is authoritative over personal experience. We don't allow our human experience to determine what we believe or the behaviors we practice, we submit to Scripture's gospel, its commands, and its authoritative statements (which is the entirety of the Bible).

### **2. Scripture Over Reason**

It's not just authoritative over our experience, Scripture is also authoritative over reason. What does this mean? It does not mean that we leave our brains at the door when we read Scripture. We mean by that, that it's authoritative over our un-aided reason and over naturalism. We assume the supernatural, we assume the existence of God and the fact that God engages in, is sovereign over, and intervenes in human history; God is providential. Another thing we mean by the authority of Scripture over reason is that unresolved issues or apparent contradictions that we find in Scripture do not negate Scripture's authority, instead we accept a wait-and-see attitude if we cannot resolve a particular issue in Scripture – the issue is with us, not the Word. We believe that God is the God of reason and that his Word will stand up under historical and scientific scrutiny. ***“For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ...”*** (2Corinthians 10:4-5)

### **3. Scripture Over Tradition**

So, as it is authoritative over experience, reason, it is also authoritative over tradition. Church traditions can be good. The ancient creeds of the church are good. They help us to understand who God is and what his word means but ultimately all church tradition must be subject to the authority of Scripture. So, Scripture is authoritative over all church traditions. One doctrine to be recovered out of the Protestant reformation was *Sola Scriptura*, that is that ultimately Scripture has the final authority. So, our first presupposition for biblical interpretation is that the Bible is God's Word.

## **II. The Interpreter Must Be Born Again**

Here is a second major presupposition, something we may often take for granted, the interpreter must be born again. The interpreter must be in a relationship with Jesus Christ to rightly comprehend God's Word.

2 Corinthians 4:4 says, ***“In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.”***

1 Corinthians 2:14 says, ***“The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.”*** Ultimately it is the Spirit who enlightens and illuminates Scripture so that we can understand it.

Now this brings up a significant question: can non-Christians understand the Bible? We raise this question because there are many Bible scholars who do not have faith in Jesus Christ, who are not believers and yet they know the historical culture, they know the background, they apparently interpret God's Word very well. So, how can we say that the interpreter must be born again? I think the answer is that someone can interpret Scripture (as a mere academic discipline) but if they do not apply it to their lives, they are mishandling God's Word.

Hebrews 4:12 says, *“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.”* God's Word is meant not just to be read and understood, it is intended to be applied to our lives. Like a two-edged sword, it is meant to cut us, to challenge us, to change us, to shape us, to guide us. If God's Word does not guide us, if one remains unaffected, if we do not allow it to guide us then we are mishandling God's Word.

To do proper biblical interpretation, we must know God, we must be born again, we must have a relationship with Jesus Christ. To read the Bible without letting it transform you is to mishandle the word and so to shortcut the process of biblical interpretation.

Those are two basic presuppositions we should have as we come to the study of God's Word.

## **The Nature of the Bible: Unity and Diversity**

As we come to the Scriptures, we must ask is what is the Bible? We can only read and understand the Bible if we understand its nature. It seems that one good way to understand the nature of the Bible is with the terms unity and diversity. Together these two terms really help us to understand what the Bible is and how we should to approach it. We'll start with the term diversity and speak about various aspects of diversity.

### **I. Diversity of the Bible**

#### **A. Kinds of Diversity**

By diversity we mean that the Bible is a diverse collection of literary works with various kinds of diversity; we have diversity of time. By diversity of time we mean that the Bible is written over a long period of time, like 1,500 years.

We have diversity of human authors; we have authors from all walks of life in the Bible. There are fisherman, tent makers, prophets; we have priests, we have kings, we have a whole range of different occupations, different backgrounds from different cultures and contexts.

There is diversity of languages; the Bible is written in two main languages. The Old Testament was written in Hebrew, the New Testament was written in Greek. And there is Aramaic in parts of both the Old Testament and then a few Aramaic words in the New Testament. **We have diversity of authors, diversity of times, diversity of cultures, diversity of languages.**

Probably most significantly, we have **diversity of genres**. A genre refers to different literary forms. What kinds of genres are in the Bible? The two main genres are prose and poetry, but there are many, many subgenres. There are psalms, proverbs, there are parables, there are letters, there are historical narratives, there are laws, there are prophecies, there's apocalyptic literature.

#### **B. Implications of Diversity**

How does that diversity affect the way we read Scripture? Here are three implications of the diversity of the Bible.

### **1. We Must Adapt Methods for Various Types of Biblical Literature**

The first implication is that we must adapt our methods for various kinds of literature. One of the aspects of diversity is diversity of genres and different genres require different methods of interpretation, different approaches. It is beyond our scope here, but different genres require different methods of interpretation. If we understand a passage or a book is poetry and not historical narrative, we will understand that when Psalm 98:8 says, ***“Let the rivers clap their hands; let the hills sing for joy together...”*** that this isn’t a literal thing. Rivers don’t have hands to clap; hills don’t have voices to sing. We understand that this is talking about all creation glorifying God.

We can easily understand this if we consider different kinds of literature. We read a user’s manual for our phone differently than we read the news, and differently than we read a novel.

### **2. We Must Recognize the Bible’s Progressive Revelation**

Here is a second implication of the diversity of the Bible. It reminds us that we must recognize the progress of revelation. There is a development of doctrine in Scripture. Later stages of the Bible do not replace the earlier stages, but they clarify the earlier passages, and they develop a gradual progression of God’s plan and purposes.

Hebrews 1:1 illustrates what we mean by the progress of revelation. Hebrews 1:1-2 says, ***“Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world.”*** Newer biblical revelation clarifies and explains older.

### **3. We Must Let the Biblical Authors Speak for Themselves**

Here is a third implication of diversity. The third implication is we must allow the biblical writers to speak for themselves. Then we can seek an internal unity behind their diverse expressions of faith. We may tend to interpret one author exclusively by another author instead of first listening to that author. We must first allow the biblical writers to speak for themselves.

We might say the diversity of Scripture is the human side of the Bible, because we recognize it was written by human beings in different cultures, in different languages at different times.

## **II. Unity of the Bible**

### **A. Unity of Theme**

Our second point is unity. Despite the diversity of authors, times and places and contexts, we have an ultimate unity in Scripture, and it is a unity of theme. That theme could be stated in a variety of ways. What is the whole Bible is about from beginning to end? Here is a

statement of theme that would describe the entire biblical revelation: **the character and actions of God in bringing salvation to sinful humanity through the person and work of Jesus Christ is the story of God's redemption.** Or even shorter: **God acts throughout redemptive history to redeem a people for Himself through His Gospel.** This theme can be one way to summarize the whole of Scripture, from beginning to end.

The Old Testament looks forward to the coming of Jesus Christ and the salvation he will accomplish. The New Testament looks back at the salvation achieved through Jesus' life, death, and resurrection and then it looks forward to the final salvation, which will be accomplished when he comes.

Jesus himself highlights this in Luke 24. It is the appearance of Jesus after his resurrection to two disciples on the road to Emmaus. These two disciples are walking along when Jesus joins them. He has just risen from the dead, but they are prevented from being able to recognize him, and as they walk along, he asks them in verse 17, ***“And he said to them, “What is this conversation that you are holding with each other as you walk?” And they stood still, looking sad.”*** Jesus sort of plays along with them, until he responds in verse 25 and 26, ***“And he said to them, “O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?”*** And then verse 27, this is Luke 24:27, ***“And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.”***

Moses refers to the first five books of the Old Testament, Genesis through Deuteronomy; the prophets are the books that follow that. This is a shorthand way of summarizing the whole of the Old Testament. So, Luke tells us beginning with Genesis and moving all the way through the Old Testament, Jesus explained to them what was said in all Scriptures concerning himself. The unifying theme of all of Scripture is the character and actions of God in bringing redemption to creation through Jesus the Messiah. The Old Covenant looks forward to Jesus; the New Covenant looks back to what he accomplished on the cross. This is one facet of the unity of Scripture.

## **B. Implications of Unity**

### **1. The Bible is One Over-arching Story**

Here we can see two key implications of unity. The first implication of the unity of Scripture is that the Bible is one story from beginning to end. And although it's made up of diverse literature, with many shorter stories, in one sense every book of the Bible relates to God's ultimate redemption. Every small narrative in the Old Testament fits into the larger narrative of Israel, and every larger narrative of Israel fits into the grand or metanarrative of all of Scripture beginning in Genesis and ending in Revelation. We must place each story into its context of God's ultimate purpose and plan for all humanity. This is sometimes referred to as ***redemptive history***. We can and should trace important themes that wind their way throughout scripture.

For instance, to understand a book like Revelation in the NT, having a good understanding of the OT is key, as many seemingly mysterious things in Revelation pick up OT themes.

## **2. The Provides a Coherent Worldview and Theology**

We can ask the question What is Truth? and by examining Scripture, come up with answers, propositions, and statements that are complete, and cohesive, coherent, and complementary, not contradictory. Genesis through Revelation forms a complete narrative of God's purpose and plan covering all topics that we need for faith and practice. So, the unity of the Bible reminds us that God's story is complete. That we can trace for instance, the doctrines of prayer, or sin, or God's love throughout the bible provides us with a coherent theology. This is sometimes referred to *systematic theology*.

In the bible, we have an over-arching story that makes sense, that begins at one point, that ends at another, that describes God's actions in human history. Not only is it complete and cohesive, ultimately it is complementary. We can read one author and understand him within his context and then read another and understand them within their context and those two authors will be complementary, they will not contradict one another, because of the unity of God's Word.

### **Basic Principles for Interpretation:**

Like math, or grammar or engineering has rules, if one wants to accurately represent God and His Word, interpretation of Scripture has rules too. Following these basic principles will guide you to more reliable conclusions and consistently biblical positions on essential doctrines. The goal is to come as close to the author's intent as we are able. To do this, we employ grammatical-historical hermeneutic. This places restraints on the interpreter in order to draw out (exegete) the author's meaning instead of reading into the text (eisegesis) his or her own meaning. The interpreter will also consider broader contexts such as the surrounding chapters, the book, or related passages to gain further understanding.

#### **1: Literal**

This means reading the Bible in its most natural sense. To do this you need to determine the genre. Is this narrative like the Gospels? Poetry like the Psalms? An epistle like Ephesians? The literal approach also takes into consideration symbols, numbers, imagery, and metaphors. With this principle, you are more likely to take sensational things as they appear. For example, 6 days in creation were 6 *literal* days, the flood was a *literal* flood, fire from heaven was *literal* fire from heaven, and Jesus' return is a *literal* return! We're going to draw literal, logical, biblically based conclusions.

#### **2: Historical**

Along with this, we attempt to get into the minds of the original audience. How would have the Israelites understood the first 5 books of the bible? How would the early church have



understood Paul's Epistle to the Romans? To get the most accurate interpretation, we must bridge the historical gap and get into the context of the author, the audience, and what it meant to *them* first! We are interested first not in the question, "What does it mean to me?" but "what did it mean to those to whom it was originally written?" Nate Pickowicz writes, "If we are to understand the context of what is written in the Bible, we have to understand the words, phrases, and ideas as they would have been understood by their original hearers."

Historical context refers to the total life situation in which the particular biblical book was written. Aspects of the general historical context would include the geographical context. John 4:3-4 says, "**he [Jesus] left Judea and departed again for Galilee. And he had to pass through Samaria.**" Understanding that Judea was in the south of Israel and was populated mostly by Jews, Galilee was in the north also populated by Jews, between the two was Samaria populated by Samaritans who were enemies of the Jews is more than helpful; it is critical to recognizing what Jesus is doing and the significance of his encounter with the woman at the well, a Samaritan woman in that particular context and understanding who the Samaritans were. Use bible dictionaries, study bibles, etc. to learn the customs, monetary system, geography as it is presented in Scripture.

### 3: Grammatical

Like in English, the languages that the Bible was written in, *mainly* Greek and Hebrew, have rules of grammar that must be honored if you're going to get the interpretation right. In Greek, for example, there is something called "mood." One of the "moods" grammatically speaking is the **imperative mood** which is communicating a verb commanding action. The grammatical-historical hermeneutic assumes that words and expressions have a relatively stable meaning during given periods of history. Therefore, we begin by taking what we can determine as the normal, everyday meaning of the words, phrases, and sentences to the extent possible. **In other words, our interpretation must correspond to the words and grammar in the text in a reasonable way. Otherwise, the interpreter could assign meaning of his own without objective control. The Bible would become a horoscope of vague sayings we try to plug into our lives however we are able.**

- Most of the Bible can be easily interpreted by simply taking the language (either in the original or translation) in the usual way (Jn. 3:36; Acts 1:11). In other words, if the plain sense makes sense, seek no other sense.
- A plain sense reading should not be confused with a literalistic interpretation. We should allow for figures of speech (Mk. 1:5; Lk. 22:19).
- If a passage contains symbols or a special literary genre this should be indicated in the text, either by textual cues, or because symbolism is required to make sense of the text. Most symbols are explained by the Bible itself (Rev. 1:9-20).

### The Process for Diligent Study:

There are some simple steps you can take to ensure deeper, more accurate, and refreshing Bible study. We want to get the meaning out of the text (**exegesis**), not make the text say what we think it says (**eisegesis**). This is the goal of the responsible bible reader. We have a high view of God and we must have a high view of His Word. We must remember that this is God's words to us, and we must let Him speak through them. So, we come to the text with these four principles in mind: *Observation, interpretation, correlation, and application.*

## **1: Observation**

Read the passage being studied several times to get a good feel for the details. Act as though you are reading this passage for the first time and observe all the facts. Ask questions of the passage:

1. *Who is involved?*
2. *What are they doing?*
3. *Where are they? Where are they going?*
4. *When did this happen, what happened before, and afterward?*
5. *Why is this happening, what happened to lead up to this event?*
6. *Had this been foretold?*
7. *What is the occasion for the author to write?*

When you take time to observe the text and context you're going to get a feel for the original meaning of the text. This prepares you to dig deeper into the interpretation of the text. Follow the thought development in the book or passage you are reading, and make sure your interpretation flows along with the general direction of argument. Sudden changes in subject are unusual. If you have the thought development of a book centering on one subject, suddenly switching to another, and then back to the first, your interpretation is almost certainly wrong.

Consider the larger context as well: which Testament? which author? what time period? Never view a passage in isolation from its surroundings. The context should be considered the most important kind of evidence in the interpretation of a passage. Context usually supplies most of what we need to know.

## **2: Interpretation**

Study the passage for any clues that can help to answer the following questions:

1. *What does this passage mean, what is being said? Attempt to discover the actual meaning of the passage.*

2. *What was the author trying to say to his original readers, how would the original readers have understood this passage?*
3. *What is the author trying to say to me? Keep in mind that there is often a significant distance (historical, political, societal, cultural, geographical, covenantal, and positional to name just a few) between the original readers and us.*
4. *Why is this here, what is the theological significance of the text?*

Keep in mind that: Don't look for hidden meanings unless you have good reason to think there is further meaning that is not obvious or indicated by the surrounding context. This means that we are not to modify the plain sense of the Bible when it contradicts our treasured beliefs but must instead modify even our treasured beliefs when the teaching of the Bible is against them. When an author uses a figure of speech, he is drawing a colorful analogy between two objects or concepts. Take for example John 1:29, ***“The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!”*** The reader must understand the literal meaning of the objects or concepts and the analogy between them. In this example (John 1:29), one must have a literal understanding of Christ, a lamb, and the role of the lamb in the sacrificial system in order to grasp the analogy John is making. Zuck writes, “Figurative language then is not antithetical to literal interpretation; it is a part of it.”

Remember also to ask questions. Because of Scripture’s unity and coherence, we can ask questions of all that we read in the Bible and expect reasonable answers that we are able to understand and that are consistent with teachings elsewhere in the Bible.

### **General Principles of Interpretation:**

- 1** - Interpret the Bible by the Bible, referring to parallel passages, noting both differences and similarities. This is sometimes called the Rule of Faith or “Regula Fidei”
- 2** - Research the words recalling that even in English the meanings of various words will change over time. Remember, too, that different words may be used to convey similar concepts, such as our use of acquaintance, friend, intimate friend, girlfriend & boyfriend, fiancée, wife & husband, or parent & child to define various aspects of the love relationship between humans.
- 3** - Evaluate the use of grammar, why were the words put together as they have been? Would another idea have been conveyed if the grammar had been different?
- 4** - Carefully consider the context of the verse, passage, paragraph, chapter, and book. Context is either near (in the same body of text) or remote (in a removed portion of text).
- 5** - Discover what the author's intent was in writing what you are reading. For example: Paul's letters generally convey the occasion of each letter, as do some of the gospels, for other writing you may have to do some research.

**6** - Study the background of the book of which your study passage is a part by use of Bible dictionaries, encyclopedias, maps, etc.

**7** - Consider the author's themes in other writings. For example: Does Revelation have anything to offer to our study of the Gospel of John?

**8** - Evaluate how you would understand the writer if they were communicating directly with you. What would you most immediately understand his meaning?

### **3: Correlation**

Correlation can be part of interpretation and is frequently done together. Cross-references and parallel passages come into play. This is also called the biblical context. When you correlate, you are bringing up passages or even phrases from other parts of the chapter, book, or entire Bible to help you to understand the section you are studying and are operating on the principle that: **The Bible is its own best interpreter.**

1. *Is this mentioned elsewhere in Scripture?*
2. *Did Jesus, the prophets, or key figures speak of this also?*
3. *What does another author say about this doctrinal theme?*
4. *Can other passages help me summarize this truth?*
5. *Do other passages provide further context or details?*

When you watch a sermon and the pastor uses cross-references, they are correlating other parts of the bible to strengthen their points and help get closer to the intended meaning of the text.

### **4: Application**

Application is how we take information and move to transformation. This is where the text alters the way we live our everyday lives. Do not rush into application until you are sure what the passage says and means, and then adjust your life accordingly. Take steps also to measure your application, evaluate your progress, and make the necessary changes in your application. If you are unable to apply the passage, try asking yourself these questions:

1. *Is there a command for me to obey?*
2. *Is there an example for me to follow?*
3. *Is there a sin here for me to avoid?*
4. *Is there something here I want to thank God for?*
5. *Is there a promise I can rest upon?*

6. *Is there a blessing I can enjoy?*
7. *Is there a failure from which I can learn?*
8. *Is there a victory for me to win?*
9. *Is there a fresh thought about God, the Lord Jesus, the Holy Spirit, Satan, man?*

Don't just study to learn, study to learn and learn to live! I have said, and this isn't original to me, that we should not look merely to master the Scripture, but to be mastered by it. Read, study and meditate on the Word with dependence upon the Holy Spirit, allowing Him to teach you. We must approach God's word with a deep reverence for God and a passion to know His will for our lives. Our study should be bathed in prayer and reliance on God as we desire to gain new insight into His Word and grow in the grace and knowledge of Christ.

I want to close with the following. I came across a sermon from C.H. Spurgeon preached June 21st, 1866 entitled *How to Read the Bible*. In it, he gives seven precepts concerning how to read the Word with greatest profit to our souls.

**I. READ AND DEPEND on the Spirit of God.**

*“Everything must depend upon the Spirit speaking through it, for even the light of the Word of God is to a great extent but moonlight, that is to say, it is a reflection of the light which streams from God Himself, who is the one, the true source of light. If God shines not upon the Word when we read it, then the Word shines not back upon us...”*

*Look up, reader! The next time the Book is in your hands, look up before you open it, and while your eye is running down the page, look up and pray that God would shine upon it, and when the chapter is finished and you put the Book away, take a minute again to look up and ask His blessing.”*

**II. READ AND MEDITATE.**

*“Reading is the gathering together of our food, but meditation is the chewing of the cud, the digesting, the assimilating of the truth. I quarry out the truth when I read, but I smelt the ore and get the pure gold out of it when I meditate...”*

*I like to turn it over and over again in my mind, for any one text of the Scriptures you will find to be like the kaleidoscope. Turn it one way, and you say, “What a fair truth is this!” Turn it another way and you see the same truth, but under how different an aspect! Turn it yet once more, and keep doing it all day, and you will be amazed and delighted to find in how many lights the same truth will appear, and what wonderful permutations and combinations you can find in it.”*

**III. READ AND APPLY.**

*“What I mean is just this. Do not read the Bible as a Book for other people. Do not read it merely to say, “Yes, it is true, very true, I believe its doctrines to be the revelation of the*

*infallible mind of God Himself.” But endeavor also in reading a passage of the Scriptures, always to see how much it belongs to you.*

*It is one thing to know these truths, and even to fight for them with the zeal and bitterness of a controversialist, but it is quite another thing to enjoy them as our own heritage and our portion forever. Ask the Lord to show you your interest in every truth, and do not be satisfied until you have an assured personal interest therein.*

*Especially let this be so with the promises. “I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.” Well, it is a very fine promise, but if it is read to me thus, “I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee,” what a transformed and glorified promise it then becomes!”*

#### **IV. READ AND PRACTICE.**

*“If you do not do this, you are reading to your own condemnation. If you read, “He that believeth on him is not condemned,” if you believe not then you are “condemned already,” because you have not believed in the Son of God. The Gospel is a very solemn thing to every man because if it is not a savor of life unto life, since it must always be a savor of some sort, it therefore becomes a savor of death unto death...”*

*God make us holy, sanctify us, spirit, soul, and body, and then we shall be made finely serviceable both to the church and to the world. Read and practice, but we shall only be able to do this as God the Holy Spirit shall help us.”*

#### **V. READ AND PRAY.**

*“This is, perhaps, coming back almost to the first point, viz., read with dependence on the Holy Spirit, but I desire to impress a rather different thought upon your souls...”*

*So when a text of Scripture lies, as it were, dead before us we may not be able to understand it, but when by prayer the text grows into life, and we set it in motion, we comprehend it at once. We may hammer away at a text sometimes in meditation, and strike it again and again, and yet it may not yield to us, but we cry to God, and straightway the text opens, and we see concealed in it wondrous treasures of wisdom and of grace...*

*A text is like a treasure chest which is locked, and prayer is the key to open it, and then we get God’s treasure.”*

#### **VI. READ AND TRY.**

*“Bring every form of truth that is delivered to you, though it may glitter with oratory and seem reasonable and proper, to the test of Scripture...”*

*To hold fast what I do know is right, but to be willing to receive or to do anything that God would teach me to receive or do is more right still. I must know what it is to which I hold fast, or else I may be injuring myself by the fixedness by which I stand to what I have learned...*

*Let us, then, take this advice, and try the spirits whether they be of God, and like the noble Bereans, search the Scriptures whether these things be so, and so read the Scriptures and try what we read."*

#### **VII. READ AND TELL OUT what you read.**

*"This will be an effectual way of imprinting it upon your own memory. When you read a passage of Scripture, and have any enjoyment therein, go to your sick neighbor and tell what God has said to you. If you meet an ignorant one when you know somewhat of the things of God, tell them to him. Nations are enriched by the interchanges of commerce, and so are Christians. We each have something that another has not, and he has something that we need."*

These are ways God has provided to us for understanding and owning the text of Scripture. David himself said this in Psalm 51, verses 12-13, ***"Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit. Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will return to you."***

Brothers and sisters, to get the most from our bibles, we must employ the resources God has provided for us. Predominantly, His authoritative Word and His indwelling Holy Spirit, who leads us into all truth. God-dependent study of God's Word leads to maturing and fruitful Christians in God's church and as salt and light to a dark and lost world.

Jesus said, ***"Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing."*** (John 15:4-5)

***Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ. (Colossians 1:28)***