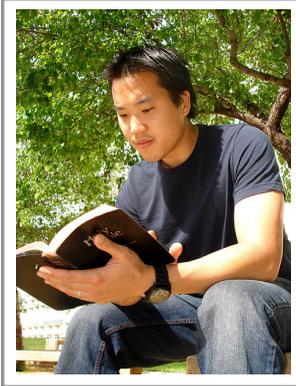


GAPS TO BRIDGE



The books of the Bible were written many centuries ago. For us to understand today what God was communicating then, there are several gaps that need to be bridged: the language gap, the cultural gap, the geographical gap, and the historical gap. Proper interpretation, therefore, takes time and disciplined effort.

1. **Language.** The Bible was originally written in Greek, Hebrew, and Aramaic. Often, understanding the meaning of a word or phrase in the original language can be a big help in correctly interpreting a passage of Scripture.
2. **Culture.** The culture gap can be tricky. Some people try to use cultural differences to explain away the more difficult Biblical commands. Realize that Scripture must first be viewed in the context of the culture in which it was written. Without an understanding of first-century Jewish culture, it is difficult to understand the Gospel. Acts and the epistles must be read in light of the Greek and Roman cultures.
3. **Geography.** A third gap that needs to be closed is the geography gap. Biblical geography makes the Bible come alive. A good Bible atlas is an invaluable reference tool that can help you comprehend the geography of the Holy Land.
4. **History.** We must also bridge the history gap. The Bible contains the records of actual historical persons and events. An understanding of Bible history will help us place the people and events in it in their proper historical perspective. A good Bible dictionary or Bible encyclopedia is useful here, as are basic historical studies.

ERRORS TO AVOID

As you interpret Scripture, several common errors should be avoided.

1. Do not make the Bible say what you *want* it to say, but rather let it say what God intended when He wrote it.
2. Avoid superficial interpretation. You have heard people say, "To me, this passage means," or "I feel it is saying. . . ." God had one meaning in mind when He inspired Scripture. Our job as Bible students is to discover that meaning.
3. Do not spiritualize the passage. Scripture should be understood in its literal, normal, and natural sense. While the Bible does contain figures of speech and symbols, they were intended to convey literal truth. In general, however, the Bible speaks in literal terms, and we must allow it to speak for itself.

ONE LAST THOUGHT

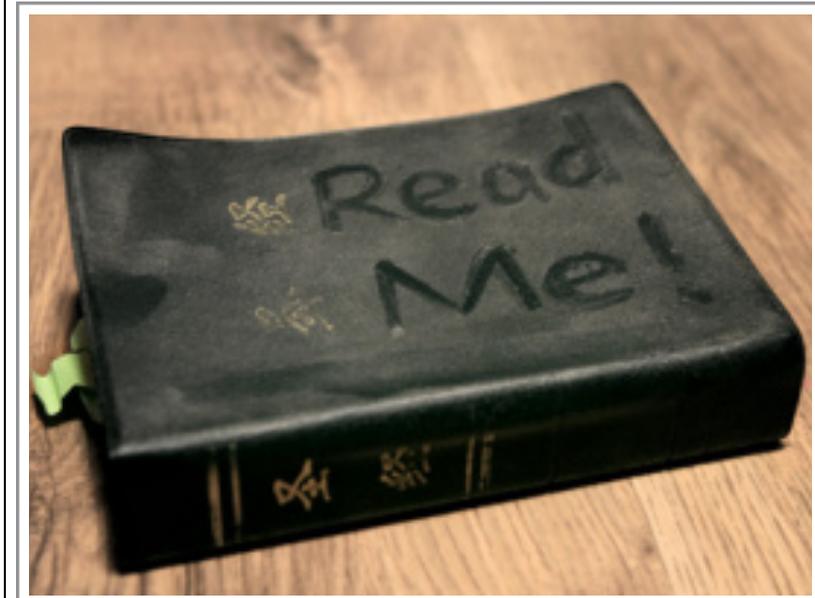
The psalmist said, *"Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the path of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful; but his delight is in the Law of the Lord, and in His Law he meditates day and night"* (Psalm 1:1, 2). It is not enough just to study the Bible. We must meditate upon it. In a very real sense we are giving our mind a bath; we are washing it in the purifying solution of God's Word.

"This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success." (Joshua 1:8)

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HOW TO STUDY THE BIBLE



Making Disciples of the
Lord Jesus Christ

WHY STUDY THE BIBLE?



Christians are called to live pure and godly lives. But how are we to know all that that entails? Long ago, the Psalmist asked the same question. He wrote, “How can a young man keep his way pure?” Then in the next breath, he

answered his own question, “By keeping it **according to Your Word**” (Psalm 119:9). For the believer, God’s Word is a “divine handbook” for living the Christian life. Without it we would be absolutely lost, but with it there is no situation we cannot face with godliness and courage. But in order to experience the power of God’s Word, we have to **know** it! The study of God’s Word is a lifelong pursuit.

THE BASICS OF BIBLE STUDY

Personal Bible study, in principle, is simple. There are five steps to Bible study which will give you a pattern to follow.

STEP 1—Reading. Develop a plan on how you will approach reading through the Bible. Unlike most books, you will probably not read it straight through from cover to cover. Choose a Bible reading plan that will help you read the Bible through at least once in a year. It’s best to choose a plan that has you reading in the Old and New Testaments simultaneously.

Read a passage of Scripture repeatedly until you understand its theme, the main truth of the passage. As you read, note in the margins any truths you particularly want to remember, and write down separately anything you do not immediately understand. Often you will find that many questions are answered by the text itself. The questions to which you cannot find answers become the starting point for more in-depth study using commentaries or other reference tools.

STEP 2—Interpreting. In Acts 8:30, Philip asked the Ethiopian eunuch, “Do you understand what you are reading?” As you read Scripture, always keep in mind one simple question: “What does this mean?” To answer that question requires the use of the most basic principle of interpretation which tells the reader to “*interpret the Bible with the Bible.*” Letting the Holy Spirit be your Teacher (1 John 2:27), search the Scripture He has authored, studying other passages which deal with the same subject. Cross references, comparative passages, concordances, and indexes can all be useful tools in this step. For those passages that yet remain unclear, consult your pastor or godly men who have studied in that particular area.

STEP 3—Evaluating. You have been reading and asking the question, “What does the Bible say?” Then you have interpreted, asking the question, “What does the Bible mean?” Now it is time to consult others to ensure that you have the proper interpretation. Remember, the Bible will never contradict itself. Read Bible introductions, commentaries, and background books which will enrich your thinking through the illumination which God has given to other men, and to you through their books. Be a true seeker. Be one who accepts the truth of God’s Word even though it may cause you to change what you always have believed, or cause you to alter your life pattern.

STEP 4—Applying. The next question is: “How does God’s truth penetrate and change my own life?” Studying Scripture without allowing it to penetrate to the depths of your soul would be like preparing a banquet without eating it. The bottom-line question to ask is, “How do the divine truths and principles contained in this passage apply to me in terms of my attitude and actions?”

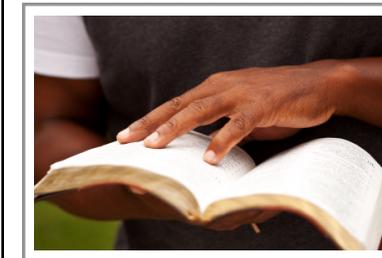
Jesus made this promise to those who would carry their personal Bible study through to this point: “If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them” (John 13:17).

Having read and interpreted the Bible, you should have a basic understanding of what the Bible says, and what it means by what it says. But studying the Bible does not stop there. The ultimate goal should be to let it speak to you and enable you to grow spiritually. That requires personal application.

Bible study is not complete until we ask ourselves, “What does this mean for my life and how can I practically apply it?” We must take the knowledge we have gained from our reading and interpretation and draw out the practical principles that apply to our personal lives.

If there is a command to be obeyed, we obey it. If there is a promise to be embraced, we claim it. If there is a warning to be followed, we heed it. This is the ultimate step: we submit to Scripture and let it transform our lives. If you skip this step, you will never enjoy your Bible study and the Bible will never change your life.

STEP 5—Correlating. This last stage connects the doctrine you have learned in a particular passage or book with divine truths and principles taught elsewhere in the Bible to form the big picture. If we arrive at an interpretation of a passage that contradicts a truth taught elsewhere in the



Scriptures, our interpretation cannot be correct. Scripture must be compared with Scripture to discover its full meaning, for the Bible does not contradict itself. Always keep in mind that the Bible is one book in 66 parts, and it contains a number of truths and principles, taught over and over again in a variety of ways and circumstances. By correlating and cross-referencing, you will begin to build a sound doctrinal foundation by which to live.