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Sunday Worship
1030 am
www.foclc.org

How to Study Your Bible – Part I

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Introduction: This lesson is part of a two part series designed to provide the members of Faith Outreach Christian Life Center with practical information that will enhance their personal Bible study regimen. Portions of these lessons are drawn from Kay Arthur's "How to Study Your Bible."

The Bible is the #1 All-time best seller. More people have read it than any other book in history. The bible is a compilation of 66 books (1,189 chapters, 31,173 verses, and 774,746 words) written by 40 authors, over a period that spanned over 1500 years. Its last recorded words were documented about 2000 years ago. It was written in Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek and has been translated into almost every language on the planet.

All of this can seem a bit confusing, but within the confusion lies the blessing of the bible. The mere fact that we have the bible today is a miracle in and of itself. The mere fact that 40 authors can write 66 books over a 1500 year span and they all come together as one sacred text is nothing less than an act of God. I can round up 40 people from the same neighborhood, the same culture, the same economic background, and the similar mental capacity and I could not get them to come up with anything comparable to the bible. Its books were written by different people, in different times, for different reasons, but they have all come together as one work. Why? Because the people penned the scriptures, but they were not the authors. They wrote the letters, but they did not manufacture the Words. They were the tools, but the Holy Spirit was the Mastermind. The Holy Spirit breathed and the Holy Spirit inspired the words in the Word! The Holy Spirit inspired Paul to write this to Timothy about His Miraculous work: **(II Tim 3:16,17 NIV) All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.**

Foundational Scripture: (II Timothy 2:15 KJV) Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.

I will open with the words of John McArthur about the Bible. He said:

"This book contains: the mind of God, the state of man, the way of salvation, the doom of sinners, and the happiness of believers. Its doctrine is holy, its precepts are binding, its histories are true, and its decisions are immutable. Read it to be wise, believe it to be saved, and practice it to be holy. It contains light to direct you, food to support you, and comfort to cheer you. It is the traveler's map, the pilgrim's staff, the pilot's compass, the soldier's sword, and the Christian's charter. Here heaven is open, and the gates of hell are disclosed. Christ is the grand subject, our good its design, and the glory of God its end. It should fill the memory, rule the heart, and guide the feet. Read it slowly, frequently, and prayerfully. It is a mine of wealth, health to the soul, and a river of pleasure. It is given to you here in this life, will be opened at the judgment, and is established forever. It involves the highest responsibility, will reward the greatest labor, and condemn all who trifle with its contents."

In the next two lessons we will discuss how to study your Bible by focusing in on the following areas:

1. **Observation:** What does the passage say?
2. **Interpretation:** What did the passage mean back then?
3. **Application:** What does the passage mean to me today?
4. **Organization:** How to prepare for Bible study.

Let me preface this by saying that this is not a comprehensive class, but rather an overview. In two lessons you will not learn everything there is to know about studying your Bible, but you will learn enough to start the process that will develop for the rest of your life.

Our Vision is to identify, win and train brothers and sisters of all nationalities and denominations into one body of Christ, who in turn will carry the ministry of this church into all the world.



First of all let me say that greatness is never achieved outside of great discipline. This is about YOU reading YOUR Bible to affect YOUR life forever. YOU must make the decision to study YOUR Bible and allow it to impact the way YOU think, speak, act, and live.

Observation: *Discovering what it says*

- **Always begin with prayer:** Jesus said, **“The Spirit shows what is true and will come and guide you into the full truth. The Spirit doesn't speak on his own. He will tell you only what he has heard from me, and he will let you know what is going to happen. The Spirit will bring glory to me by taking my message and telling it to you. Everything that the Father has is mine. That is why I have said that the Spirit takes my message and tells it to you.”** (John 16:13-15 CEV). Invoke the presence and the power of the Holy Spirit.
 - **Bible study is a science** – you must be exact with words, context, and etc.
 - **Bible study is an art** – you must be creative and imaginative as you allow yourself to be drawn into the text, its time, culture, and etc.
 - **Bible study is a spiritual act** – The Holy Spirit is the teacher and the author. The author of the book and the teacher of the class lives in you. Let Him impart into you by invoking His presence.

- **Identify the context.** Context always rules in interpretation.
- The word context means, “that which goes with the text.”
- Think of a tadpole in a creek. In this case, the context is the creek. What a tadpole does in a lake may be different than what he does in a creek. Same tadpole, different setting (context), different results.
- Context is the words, phrases and sentences that surround a word, phrase or sentence.
- Example: the word trunk. This one word could mean: a part of a car, a part of an elephant, a part of a tree, or a piece of luggage. So if you came across the word trunk in a sentence, you would have to look at the words around it to figure out which meaning would apply. That is context. The environment (surrounding the text) in which the word appears shows the possible meaning intended.

- **Observe the obvious.** Look for things in the text that are easy to see.
- In an attempt to be “deep,” many overlook the obvious.
- Who are the people in the text? What is their position?
- What are the places?
- What are the things or objects?
- At this point you simply make a note of what is in the text.
- Example: Jesus feeding 5,000.

(Mat 14:15-21 KJV) And when it was evening, his disciples came to him, saying, This is a desert place, and the time is now past; send the multitude away, that they may go into the villages, and buy themselves victuals. But Jesus said unto them, They need not depart; give ye them to eat. And they say unto him, We have here but five loaves, and two fishes. He said, Bring them hither to me. And he commanded the multitude to sit down on the grass, and took the five loaves, and the two fishes, and looking up to heaven, he blessed, and brake, and gave the loaves to his disciples, and the disciples to the multitude. And they did all eat, and were filled: and they took up of the fragments that remained twelve baskets full. And they that had eaten were about five thousand men, beside women and children.

- Time: evening.
- Location: Desert place with surrounding villages.

- Persons: Jesus, disciples, 5,000 men + women and children; a little boy.
- The people are hungry.
- The boy has two fish and five loaves.
- 12 baskets left over.

- **Deal with the text objectively.** Let the text speak for itself.
- This is hard because we have a tendency to jump to conclusions early.
- We also have a tendency to make the text apply to today's present context without first understanding what it meant back then.
- Another problem is that we have heard so much preaching that we immediately jump to Rev. so-and-so, or Bishop bubblegum's sermon on the text.
- Force yourself to simply look at the text for what it is and what it is saying.

- **Read with purpose.** Ask questions of the text.
- Who:
 - Who wrote it? Who said it?
 - Who are the major characters in the text?
 - To whom is the author speaking?
 - About whom is the author speaking?
- What:
 - What are the main events?
 - What are the major ideas?
 - What are the major teachings?
 - What are these people like?
 - What does the author talk about the most?
 - What is the purpose of the author's writing?
- When:
 - When was it written?
 - When did the event take place?
 - When did he say it?
 - When did he do it?
- Where:
 - Where was this done?
 - Where was this said?
 - Where did it happen or where will it happen?
- Why:
 - Why was there a need for this to be written?
 - Why was there so much or so little writing devoted to his event or teaching?
 - Why was this reference mentioned?
 - Why is this in the Bible?
- How:
 - How is it done?
 - How did it happen?
 - What was used to bring it to pass?
- If you force yourself to do this you will be amazed at all you can learn.
- These are all building blocks for interpretation. Don't rush to interpretation quickly.
- **If you rush to interpretation without first doing a proper observation you will taint the scripture with your own presumptions.**
- Simple example: **(John 7:1 KJV) After these things Jesus walked in Galilee, for He did not desire to walk in Judea, because the Jews sought to kill Him.**
 - Who: Jesus
 - What: He was walking.
 - Where: Galilee, not Judea.
 - Why: Because the Jews wanted to kill him.
 - When: After these things.
 - What things? The things explained in the previous verses.

- The more you do this, to more of a habit it will become in your Bible study time.
- These are all building blocks for interpretation. Don't rush to interpretation quickly.

- **Get the Big picture of the book you are in.**
- Read and re-read the book.
- Know what kind of book it is:
 - Is it historical? Like Genesis, Exodus, Judges, Acts, etc.
 - Is it biographical? Like Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.
 - Is it poetic? Like Psalms.
 - Is it proverbial? Like proverbs.
 - Is it prophetic? Like Daniel or Revelation.
 - Is it an epistle (letter)? Like Ephesians, Galatians, 1st John, etc.
 - Is it a combination? Like Daniel is both historical and prophetic.
- What is the theme or recurring submit of the book? For example, Paul used the word joy five times and the word rejoice eight times in the letter to the church at Phillipi; a book with only four chapters.
- These would be "Key Words."
- Do the chapters have themes? Like 1st Corinthians 13 – the Love chapter or Hebrews 11 – the Hall of Faith!

Interpretation: Discovering what it meant

- Have you ever walked out of a class and heard someone ask, "Did the teacher do their homework?" This is where we must do ours. We all want to know what the text means to us today, but we should first know what it meant back then.
- **Principles of Interpretation:**
 - 1. **Context always rules:** We have already covered this.
 - 2. **Always seek the full counsel of the Word of God:** Do not accept a teaching just because someone used one or two isolated verses from God's Word. Ask yourself: how does this apply to the rest of the Bible?
 - 3. **Scripture will never contradict scripture:**
 - Know that God will never contradict Himself.
 - There are no contradictions in scripture, just misinterpretations.
 - 4. **Do not base your doctrine on a obscure and isolated passage:** There are passages that are difficult to understand. For example, an excerpt from 1st Corinthians 15:29 says, "**What will they do, those being baptized on behalf of the dead?**" Because of this one "excerpt," there are people who baptize dead corpses and others who get baptized for dead corpses.
 - 5. **Interpret Scripture Literally:** Take the Word of God at face value; in its normal and natural sense. Look for the clear teaching of scripture, not some hidden meaning.
 - 6. **Look for the Author's intended meaning:** What did they mean to say and why did they mean to say it? Understand what they had in mind. Don't twist a verse to mean what you want it to mean. For example, in Judges 6 the author simply tells us what Gideon did when he was trying to make sure he was dealing with God. This passage is descriptive and not prescriptive. It describes the fact that Gideon put out a fleece, it does not prescribe any teaching for us to do the same.
 - 7. **Check your conclusions with reliable commentaries:** You want to make sure that you are not the ONLY person in history to come up with this interpretation. We will talk more about commentaries in the next lesson.

- **Let Scripture interpret Scripture:** The Bible is one revelation without contradiction.
- God does not normally exhaust one subject in just one book. There are more books of the Bible that teach on that one subject. Find out what they say.



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- Use an exhaustive Concordance in:
 - Book form: like “Strong’s Concordance.”
 - Electronic form: like a software program like e-sword (www.e-sword.net).
 - Online: like the one accessed at www.blueletterbible.com.
- A concordance will help you find all the verses in the Bible that have the word(s) you are studying.
- Cross reference scripture with scripture and see how they help support your interpretation. If it does not help support your interpretation, you may have made a mistake.

- **Draw conclusions on what it meant:**
- After you are familiar with the author, the setting, and the context, ask the Holy Spirit to show you how this applied back then?
- How did this apply in the world of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob. This is important, before you start trying to apply it to the world of Ray-Ray, Pookie, and Sally.
- Write down your conclusions and make sure you can understand them.
- Once you understand what it meant, you are one step closer to getting to what it means to you today.