



Sunday Evening Series: On The Pastor's Heart
Pastor Jonathan: Bible Study Basics

Good evening! Tonight we're going to try to get really practical and answer the question - **How do I read my Bible? How do I get the most out of the time that I spend in God's word?**

Now, many of you have been reading the Bible for a long time, but before you just check out and say "I've got this, I don't need to listen," I'll just say that what we're talking about tonight IS basic, but it is important and **helpful for us to be reminded of these things as we all strive to better know and understand God's word.**

Before we get going, **let's pray.**

So this is a talk on Bible Study Basics - and what I'm going to do is just give us a starting point for what to do when we open our Bibles

Two truths we need to remember as we get going here:

1. Reading the Bible is not always easy

I don't think it's very helpful to lie to you and tell you that reading your bible is easy. Or that you should just give it a few minutes a day. **Studying the Bible is a discipline.** And like any discipline it takes practice, and hard work, there will be days that feel like you're seeing everything so clearly and days when it feels like you don't have any idea what you just read.

And what's the reason why?...

Because of our own weakness, not because of any weakness in his word, we are easily distracted, easily confused, and easily frustrated by God's word.

Maybe you've experienced some of these frustrations:

- I want to read the Bible but I just don't know how
- I'm reading, but I feel like I have no idea what it's saying
- I'm having trouble applying this passage to my life
- I read the same thing over and over and have no idea what I just read

Have any of you run into any of these issues before? When you run into barriers like these, reading your Bible, which is supposed to be profoundly encouraging for us, actually becomes a discouraging experience.

If the problem is with us, not with the book, then that means we need some help. **Where does that help come from?**

2. We need the help of the Spirit to illuminate God's word in our hearts to help us understand it

The Bible is a spiritual book. We need spiritual help to understand it.

The beginning of that spiritual understanding is conversion, which we talked about a couple of weeks ago.

2 Cor. 4:6 "For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."

But our spiritual dependence upon God doesn't stop at conversion, does it? Apart from the help of God, we can do nothing, especially not understand the truth of his word.

This is why David prays in Ps. 119:18

Psa. 119:18 "Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of your law."

Last verse on this:

1Cor. 2:14 The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are vfolly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.

So what this means is that we need the help of the spirit of God to understand the truth of God's word. Nothing more, nothing less.

This means everyone in this room can, by the help of the Spirit, study and understand and apply God's word

What do you need? You simply need His Spirit within you, opening up the eyes of your heart to behold the truth.

Any questions before we move on?

So we are trying to understand how to get the most out of our time in God's word. And what I have for us tonight is **6 questions to ask when reading your Bible**. These questions will help you as you think through the passage you're trying to study.

6 Questions to ask when studying Your Bible:

1. What are my **Surroundings**

In other words, this is asking about CONTEXT. Context is crucial to our understanding God's word. If we misunderstand the context, we're more likely to misinterpret and misapply God's word.

Context is incredibly important! We wouldn't pick up The Chronicles of Narnia and read a paragraph from page 57, and then close the book and pretend to have any idea what's going on!

We need to understand what the context is of the passage we're studying - each verse belongs to a passage which belongs to a chapter, which belongs to a book, which belongs to the entire Bible.

When we study God's word we need to have at least a general sense of what is going on in the book we're reading from, and also where that book fits in the whole of scripture.

So some context questions to ask yourself when you study a passage

- What's going on around my passage? Look a paragraph before and a paragraph after.
- What role does this passage play in the bigger book?
- Who's writing this? To whom? Why?
- Where is this in the storyline of scripture?

Yes, the bible is 66 individual books, but it is one big story. We need to have a sense of where we are in our passage - is this in the Old Testament, before Jesus has come, has Jesus risen from the dead yet? Is this in the age of the early church?

So knowing our surroundings will help us to better understand our passage.

2. What is this **Saying**? (Observation)

This question is about Observation. This is probably the easiest part of Bible study - you are simply taking note of what is there. You're looking for key words, for repeated phrases, anything that might be significant. This is also where you might jot down some questions that you have just from first glancing through your passage.

You're taking note of people and events. You are acting like a detective who just showed up at a crime scene- you come in, you're not looking to really touch anything or move anything around, you are simply observing and getting as much information as you can.

3. What is the **Significance** of what this is saying? (Interpretation - What does this mean?)

Now this is where you move to interpretation. What is the significance - we are moving from "what does this say" to "what does this mean?"

Open up your bibles to Romans chapter 8 verse 1.

As you turn there, let me ask you this: **how many correct interpretations are there of a passage?**

There can **only be one** correct interpretation. There can be several unique applications, as we'll see in a moment, but only one interpretation.

Romans 8:1, one of the most glorious verses in the Bible, says this:

Rom. 8:1 "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."

What is the significance of this verse? What is its meaning? It's that if you are in Jesus Christ, you are no longer condemned for your sin. That means that Jesus is the solution to our sin problem. That means that we are made free and declared innocent in him!

A **wrong interpretation of Romans 8:1** would be, "God doesn't condemn anyone." No, the freedom from our condemnation is found in Christ Jesus. That is the correct interpretation of this verse.

Now this is a step where we may need some help. I recommend trying to interpret a passage without any other resources first, but after you've studied and tried to interpret a passage, it might be helpful to use some additional resources to help you out.

- Study Bibles
- Commentaries
- Trusted authors, resources online

4. Where is my **Savior**?

In other words, how does this passage point us to Christ? How is it fulfilled in Him? What does it teach us about him?

Now, when you're in a verse like Romans 8:1, that's pretty easy, isn't it? But this is especially important when you're in the Old Testament.

The entire Bible, Old and New, is about the glory of God revealed in Jesus Christ. The Old Testament, just like the New, is about Jesus. So if you are reading the Old Testament, you should be looking for Jesus!

Turn with me to Luke 24:25-27

25 And he said to them, "O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! 26 Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his

glory?" 27 And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself."

Then skip down to verse 44:

Luke 24:44 Then he said to them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled." 45 Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures.

The Old Testament is written in the key of anticipation. It's about Jesus. In some way, every single passage of the Old Testament points us forward to him.

Jesus understands the entire Old Testament to be about him. When he reads the Old Testament, he says, yes this is about ME. You cannot understand it apart from ME.

So, if you're studying the Old Testament, and you haven't drawn a line to Jesus, then you aren't finished with your study. And ***until you interpret it in light of Jesus, you haven't rightly interpreted the Old Testament.***

So, for example, say you are reading about the temple. You learn all about the ins and outs of the temple, how the priesthood and the sacrifices worked, when and where all of this went down, and then you stop... you may have learned some interesting facts, but you're missing the point - the point is that it must be interpreted in light of Jesus! **Jesus is the true temple, where man comes into the presence of God to worship.**

Any questions here?

5. How Can I **Summarize** This? (Big Idea)

I call this the "big idea," I think it's helpful to try to walk away from a study of a passage with a one sentence summary of it's significance. Not just what's happening, but what it means. If you can boil it down to one sentence, then you probably have a good grasp of what it means. When I do a study of a passage like this, I leave room in my notes to write down just a one sentence summary.

Last question,

6. What are my next **Steps**

This is application- what steps do I take now? You've studied the passage, you've interpreted it in light of Christ, but now what do you do with it?

From Capitol Hill Baptist Church's Core Seminar:

- 1. Does it point out *sin* in my life?
- 2. What *assumptions* does it have that I don't share?
- 3. Is there a *command* to obey?

- 4. Is there an *encouragement*?
- 5. Is there a *promise for me*?
- 6. Does it teach me something about God?
- 7. Does it teach me something about *myself*?
- 8. What evidence for my *faith* does it give me?
- 9. What will I *do* differently today?
- 10. How can I model/share/teach this truth to encourage *others*?
- 11. What application is there for us as a *family* or as a *church*?

Now, why do we do application last?

The best way to misapply a passage is to fail to understand and interpret it first. You have to know what it means - that ONE interpretation, before you can know what this means for you to do.

I find it helpful to start my applications with the word BECAUSE. This helps keep us aware from sheer moralism by rooting our actions in the truth.

Example: Because God is holy, I am to fight for holiness in my daily life.

Because Jesus has all authority, I am to actively share the gospel.

That way, we always root our application in the truth of the passage. This safeguards us from making the applications we want to make rather than the application the text would have us make. It also keeps us from sheer moralism by rooting our action in the truth of God.

Any questions?

So, to wrap this all up - Bible study is not always easy, but it is so worth it. And with the help of the spirit, each of us can and should labor to understand and apply God's word.

The 6 questions, one more time to review:

1. What are my surroundings?
2. What is this saying?
3. What is the significance?
4. Where is my savior?
5. How can I summarize?
6. What are my next steps?

Let's pray.