

PRACTICING FAITH: 4 THINGS YOU CAN DO TO CHANGE YOUR LIFE #1

Introduction to the Four Week Class (Wednesday Nights 6:15-7:30)

March 30	How to READ the BIBLE for All it's Worth
April 6	You're too Busy not to PRAY
April 13	Taking a FAST to find God
April 20	Finding REST in a Hurried World (Sabbath-keeping)

WEEK ONE: How to Read the Bible for All it's Worth---The Importance of WORD & SPIRIT!

How Important is the Bible to you? The Bible is God's Revelation to us. The Bible is Inspired by the Holy Spirit. The Bible is both a human and divine book. Psalm 119 (all but especially verses 105-106); 2 Timothy 3:15-17; 2 Peter 2:12-21.

Introduction...a personal story

Here are some simple guidelines for reading the Bible for all it's worth...

- I. **Pray** before you Read. Pray while you Read. Pray when you are done Reading... "Lord speak to me."
- I. **Just Read the Bible...Select a version/translation (Know that every translation is an interpretation). Set a time to Read. Have a Plan to Read.**
- II. **Interpret the Bible: The Simple Questions: What did this mean? What does this mean?** It's not enough to read the text and jump directly to the application; we must first determine what it means, otherwise the application may be incorrect.
- III. **Mind The Gaps...Gaps to Bridge:** The first step in interpreting the Bible is to recognize the four gaps we have to bridge: language, culture, geography, and history. Text and Context.
 - A. 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 the key to correctly interpreting a passage of Scripture.
 - B. Culture:** The culture gap can be tricky. Some people try to use cultural differences to explain away the more difficult biblical commands. Don't fall into that trap, but realize that we must first view Scripture 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 gospels. Acts and the epistles must be read in light of the Greek and Roman cultures.
 - C. Geography:** A third gap that needs to be closed is the geography gap. Biblical geography makes the Bible come alive.
 - D. History:** We must also bridge the history gap. Unlike the Scriptures of most other world religions, 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.

IV. Principles to Understand: Four principles should guide us as we interpret the Bible: literal, historical, grammatical, and synthesis.

A. **The Literal Principle:** Scripture should be understood in its literal, normal, and natural sense. While the Bible is written in different genres and it 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.

B. **The Historical Principle:** This means that we interpret Scripture in its historical context. We must ask what the text meant to the people to whom it was first written. In this way we can develop a proper contextual understanding of the original intent of Scripture.

C. **The Grammatical Principle:** This requires that we understand the basic grammatical structure of each sentence in the original language. To whom do the pronouns refer? What is the tense of the main verb? You'll find that when you ask some simple questions like those, the meaning of the text immediately becomes clearer.

D. **The Synthesis Principle:** This is what the Reformers called the *analogia scriptura*. It means that the Bible doesn't contradict itself. 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.

V. Apply the Bible: 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. Bible study doesn't stop there. The ultimate goal is to let it speak to me and enable me to grow spiritually. That requires personal application.

Bible study is not complete until we ask ourselves, "What does it mean for my/our life and how can I/we practically apply it?" We must take the knowledge we've 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 pay attention to 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.

Some Tools that May Help

***A Study Bible; Atlas, Bible Commentary, Bible Dictionary, Bible Encyclopedia.

***Reading and Studying the Bible in Community with Others...Yes the Bible speaks to us personally but it was written not to/for individuals but for the community of God's People.

AN IMPORTANT GUIDE to Biblical Genres

Law: This contains the instructions and precepts of Moses, such as Leviticus and Deuteronomy. Law is "God's law", and is the expression of His sovereign will and character. The writings of Moses contain a lot of Law. God provided the Jews with many laws (619 or so). These laws defined the proper relationship with God, to one another, and with the world (the alien), as well as for worshipping God, governing the people, priestly duties, what to eat and not eat, how to build the temple, proper behavior, manners, and social interaction, etc. The Ten Commandments are often known as "The Law;" so are Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. In the New Testament, the "Sermon on the Mount" is considered law and the fulfillment of the law, and Paul's calls to the church are law in their literature form. Most Christians have a distorted view of the law and think it does not apply to us. Jesus repeated and affirmed the Ten Commandments and the Law of Moses. The law points to our depravity and need for a Savior. Without the law, there would be no relationship to God or need for Christ to save us. Christ fulfills the law and thus we are not bound to its curse, but we must acknowledge its role in our lives as the pointer to the Cross and the mirror to our soul.

History or Narrative: These are the stories and the epics, and include: Genesis, Exodus, Numbers, Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings, 1 and 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, Jonah, and Acts. Almost every Old Testament book contains history. Some books of the Bible are grouped together and commonly referred to as the "History" (Joshua, Kings, and Chronicles); these books tell us the history of the Jewish people from the time of the Judges through the Persian Empire. In the New Testament, Acts contains some of the history of the early church, and the Gospels also have history; Jesus' life is told as history. Even the Epistles have history as they chronicle events. There is also another sub-category of narrative called "Romance;" this is narrative written also as a love story such as Ruth and Song of Solomon.

Wisdom: This is the literature of maxims and sayings, including Job, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes. Wisdom Literature focuses on questions about the meaning of life (Job, Ecclesiastes) and on practical living and common sense (Proverbs and some Psalms). This literature contrasts our faulty human wisdom to God's reasoning perfection. Thus, when we live for our own will and not His, we will experience grief and frustration, not because God is vengeful and angry, but because we led ourselves that way out of our pride and arrogance. This literature warns us of our evil nature and desires.

Poetry: These are the prose and rhyme books such as Psalms, Song of Solomon, and Lamentations. Poetry is found mostly in the Old Testament and is similar to modern poetry. Since it is a different language of Hebrew, the Bible's poetry can be very different because it does not translate into English very well. Poetry that we are used to is usually based on parallelisms, rhythm, or various types of sound mixings, as is our music. Hebrew poetry is based on a tempo of stanzas and phrases re-told differently called "synonymous parallelism", conveying the same ideas and meaning in contrasting or similar ways. Some called "synthetic parallelism," also have extra ideas and words inserted. "Antithetic parallelism" is mostly contrasting stanzas, and is very predominant in Proverbs. Some Bible books are all poetry (Psalms, Song of Songs, and Lamentations), and some books only have a few verses such as in Luke.

Gospel: This word means the "good news" that we received through salvation by the work and life of God's Son, Jesus Christ. When the Gospels were first written in the first century, it was a brand new form of literature. The four Gospels (Mark, Matthew, Luke, and John) contain a bit of all the literary types with the primary purpose of expressing faith in Christ and what He has done on our behalf. In these works, the stories are not necessarily in chronological or sequential order, except for Luke. In this type of literature, we find what is called a "Parable." These are the sayings of Jesus that are narrative and instructional, contained in the Gospels. Each of the gospels presents the teachings, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus in a distinctive way, but not contradictory, and for a specific audience. Matthew was written to Jews, and Luke to Greeks, both with different ways of reasoning and thinking. Think of the Gospels like the facets of a diamond, giving more depth and meaning.

Parables: These are the sayings of Jesus told in a short story or illustration form that are narrative and instructional; they teach a truth, and are contained in the Gospels. Usually, these are from everyday life examples that may have taken place or may not. At times, such as in the Parable of the Sower, Jesus was possibly pointing to it as He taught. These had a deeper purpose than the face value of the illustration, thus it took some thinking and a desire to learn in order to understand them. Perhaps, He used them to keep people of impiety and without intent of faith from bothering Him; or, perhaps He wanted to challenge the skeptics and people who were unresponsive.

Epistle/Letter: This refers to the 21 letters in the New Testament written to a specific audience that are also practical for us today such as Romans, Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Thessalonians, Timothy, Titus, Philemon, Hebrews, James, Peter, John, and the first three chapters of Revelation. Epistles are the personal letters from the Apostles to their churches. These letters are both different and similar to the letters of their time. Most challenge the congregation to wake up out of their selfish ways and to concentrate on Christ in specific ways and clarifications. They begin with the names of the writer and the recipient, then a greeting, a reason for the letter, and then the central message or body of the letter; there is usually a closing, just like most letters today. The epistles deal with concerns and false teachings that needed immediate correction. Some epistles were written in response to questions from the church, or for clarification for another letter, such as II Corinthians. The teachings of the epistles applied to both to the church they were written to, and also to Christians today. However, we need to understand the cultural and historical situation to better understand what is going on, so we do not misunderstand what is being said.

Prophecy means past, present, and future, not just the future. This includes major and minor prophets- Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi. Prophecy is the type of literature that is often associated with predicting the future. However, it also contains God's words of "get with it or else." There are two main types. One is "predictive," as in foretelling an event, and the other is "didactic," challenging others to line up morally or to teach a truth. Thus, prophecy also exposes sin and calls for repentance and obedience. It shows how God's law can be applied to specific problems and situations, such as the repeated warnings to the Jews before their captivity. This is found in the Old Testament books of Isaiah through Malachi, the section of the Bible labeled "Prophecy" by both Jews and Christians. There are over 2000 specific predictions that have already come to pass, hundreds of years after the author's death!

In the New Testament, prophecy is mainly found in Matthew 24 and the book of Revelation. Prophecy has both an immediate call to a given situation, such as the "seven churches of Revelation", and a predated future to come to pass. That is, it is two fold-a past and a future, both applying to the present. Some predictions are already fulfilled, such as the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ and some have yet to come to pass such as sections of Daniel, 2 Peter, Revelation, and the return of Christ.

Apocalyptic: These are combinations of narrative and prose written in vivid imagery and poetic phrases that are intended to exaggerate for a purpose such as Daniel and most of Revelation. Apocalyptic writing is a more specific form of prophecy. Apocalyptic writing is a type of literature that warns us of future events from which full meaning is hidden to us for the time being. Apocalyptic writing is almost a "secret," giving us glimpses of what is to come through the use of symbols and imagery. We may not know the meanings now, but time will flush it out. Apocalyptic writing is found in Isaiah, Daniel, Ezekiel, Zechariah, and Revelation. **Warning:** a lot of Christian writers love to embellish on this subject and give their own version of what will happen. But, the scores of books that have been written in the last hundred years have not panned out in their theories. It is "their" theories, not based on fact or careful study of scripture. The Bible clearly tells us we do not have access to that information; no one will know the time.

For a more in-depth and insightful look into the *genres* and knowing the Bible, see the resources *How to read the Bible for all it's Worth*, by Fee, Zondervan, and *Knowing Scripture* by R.C. Sproul, Inter Varsity. For the serious student or seminarian, *Exegetical Fallacies* by D.A. Carson, Baker, and *Biblical Exegesis* by Hayes, John Knox Press are very good.