

HOW SHOULD A NEW BELIEVER STUDY THE BIBLE?

KEY TEXT

2 TIM. 3:16-17

A simple method for understanding and obeying God's Word

MORE THAN READING WORDS

Bible study is not merely collecting verses, finishing chapters, or finding statements that agree with us. It is carefully hearing what God has written, understanding the meaning He intended, and responding with faith and obedience. The goal is not information alone, but a life increasingly governed by truth.

01

Why every believer needs Scripture

God's Word is the believer's final authority for truth, doctrine, correction, and daily direction. Feelings change, teachers can be mistaken, traditions may drift, and popular ideas come and go. Scripture remains the trustworthy standard by which every belief and practice must be examined.

TRUTH

Scripture reveals who God is, what Christ has done, what the gospel means, and how believers should live.

GROWTH

The Word renews the mind, exposes sin, strengthens faith, comforts the heart, and equips the believer for good works.

DISCERNMENT

A believer who knows Scripture is better prepared to recognize false teaching, misplaced promises, and spiritual deception.

"All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness."

2 TIMOTHY 3:16

02

Approach the Bible with the right heart

The same passage can be read with very different motives. Come to Scripture ready to learn, not merely to confirm what you already think. Ask God for wisdom, accept correction when the text confronts you, and determine beforehand that truth will have authority over preference.

READ PRAYERFULLY

Ask God to open your understanding and help you receive His Word honestly. Prayer does not replace careful reading; it prepares the heart to read with dependence and reverence.

READ WILLINGLY

Do not ask only, "What does this say?" Also ask, "Am I willing to believe and obey what it says?" A teachable heart is essential for spiritual growth.

OBSERVE WHAT GOD HAS WRITTEN

Before asking what a passage means, notice what it actually says.

03

Read the passage, not merely one verse

Many mistakes begin when a sentence is separated from its setting. Read the paragraph, the chapter, and when possible the entire Bible book. Notice how the author develops his message. The surrounding verses often answer questions that an isolated verse creates.

BEFORE AND AFTER

Read what comes immediately before and after. Look for explanations, contrasts, conclusions, and connecting words.

REPEATED WORDS

Repeated names, commands, ideas, promises, and warnings often reveal what the writer is emphasizing.

FLOW OF THOUGHT

Notice words such as therefore, for, but, if, because, and so that. They show how one statement relates to another.

“So they read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading.”

NEHEMIAH 8:8

04

Ask the basic questions

Observation slows the reader down. Do not rush immediately to a personal application. First gather the facts that are present in the text. Write brief answers in your own words without adding assumptions the passage does not state.

WHO?

Who wrote the book? Who is speaking? Who is being addressed? Are believers, unbelievers, Israel, a church, or an individual in view?

WHAT?

What command, event, doctrine, promise, warning, problem, or response appears? What is the main subject?

WHY AND HOW?

Why was this written? What reason does the author give? How does the passage explain that the truth should be understood or obeyed?

05

Record what you can clearly see

A notebook helps separate observation from imagination. Summarize the passage in one sentence. List important words, commands, contrasts, questions, and repeated ideas. Mark anything you do not yet understand, but do not invent an answer simply to fill the gap.

OBSERVATION BEFORE INTERPRETATION

Do not begin with, “What does this verse mean to me?” Begin with, “What did the inspired writer communicate to the people addressed?” Personal response comes after the meaning has been established.

UNDERSTAND THE INTENDED MEANING

Let context and Scripture govern the conclusion.

06

Context controls the meaning

Words receive meaning from the sentences, paragraphs, books, and historical settings in which they appear. A verse cannot rightly mean the opposite of its context. Ask what problem, question, event, or doctrine the writer is addressing and how the passage fits the purpose of the whole book.

IMMEDIATE CONTEXT

The nearest verses usually provide the first and strongest explanation of a statement.

BOOK CONTEXT

Identify the book's audience, purpose, major themes, and place in the writer's argument.

BIBLE CONTEXT

Understand the passage within the whole counsel of Scripture without erasing its original audience or purpose.

“Study to shew thyself approved unto God... rightly dividing the word of truth.”

2 TIMOTHY 2:15

07

Compare Scripture with Scripture

Because the Bible is true and unified, clear passages help illuminate more difficult ones. Compare texts that address the same subject, but do not combine unrelated verses merely because they share one word. Similar language does not always mean identical context.

BEGIN WITH CLEAR PASSAGES

Build doctrine from passages that directly teach the subject. Do not allow an obscure phrase, symbolic image, or unusual experience to overturn repeated, plain teaching.

READ THE WHOLE TESTIMONY

One verse may reveal one part of a truth. Gather the relevant passages and allow them to speak together before forming a conclusion.

08

Avoid common errors

Faithful study requires humility. The reader must be willing to abandon an interpretation when the wording, context, or wider teaching of Scripture does not support it.

Five errors to reject

- Isolating a verse. A true sentence can be misused when removed from the writer's argument.
- Reading feelings into the text. Sincerity does not turn a preferred idea into the biblical meaning.
- Ignoring the audience. Every command and promise must first be understood in its stated setting.
- Making every detail symbolic. Do not search for hidden meanings when the passage communicates plainly.
- Building doctrine on one difficult text. Interpret uncertain passages in harmony with clear, repeated teaching.

APPLY AND OBEY THE TRUTH

Right interpretation should lead to a faithful response.

09

Application must flow from meaning

A passage may have many valid applications, but it has one intended meaning in its context. First establish what the text teaches; then ask how that truth should shape belief, character, decisions, relationships, worship, and service. Application never gives permission to change the meaning.

BELIEVE

Is there a truth about God, Christ, salvation, the church, or the Christian life that must be trusted?

OBEY

Is there a command to follow, a sin to confess, a habit to change, or a responsibility to accept?

REMEMBER

Is there a warning to heed, an example to follow or avoid, or a promise that truly applies in this context?

“But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves.”

JAMES 1:22

10

Use a simple five-step method

The following pattern can be used for a short daily study or a longer examination of a chapter. Move slowly enough to understand, but keep the method simple enough to repeat consistently.

THE BIBLICLIST FIVE-STEP METHOD

- 1. READ: Read the whole passage carefully, more than once when possible.
- 2. OBSERVE: Record the people, setting, repeated words, commands, contrasts, and flow of thought.
- 3. UNDERSTAND: Summarize the main point in its context and compare relevant Scripture.
- 4. RESPOND: Identify a truth to believe and one specific act of obedience.
- 5. PRAY: Thank God for the truth and ask for grace to live according to it.

A wise place to begin

Start with complete Bible books rather than random verses. The Gospel of John clearly presents Jesus Christ and belief in Him. Acts records the spread of the gospel and the early church. Romans explains the gospel carefully. Ephesians teaches the believer's position and walk. Philippians, James, and 1 John provide practical instruction for Christian living and assurance.

FINAL REFLECTION

Will I submit to what God has written?

Bible study is not complete when the page has been understood but the life remains unchanged. Read carefully, respect the context, compare Scripture faithfully, and obey the truth God has made clear. The mature believer is not merely one who knows many verses, but one whose thinking and conduct are increasingly shaped by the Word of God.

BIBLICLIST

Man's Questions. God's Answers.

bibliclist.org