

5 Questions to Help You Understand the Bible

The Bible contains the very words of God. He wrote and preserved it for us so we could know Him and how to live in a way that reflects and glorifies Him. Biblical interpretation is not a mysterious or impossible task limited to the elite or studious with lots of time. It is the delight and joy of every Christian woman to grow in understanding her marvelous God and His ways. We should approach scripture with the normal methods and rules that we would use to understand any written form of communication. However, we must not lose sight of the fact that the Bible is the word of God, so we should be diligent to handle it rightly by thoughtful reading, careful interpretation, and willing application of its words to our lives.

The goal of studying the Bible is to understand and apply the original meaning of the Scriptures as the God-ordained writers intended. It is not just to gain facts or knowledge but to be changed by the words of Scripture to be more like Christ.

“Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth.” – 1 Timothy 2:15

There are **five (5) questions** that must be asked and answered in order to understand, apply, and communicate God’s Word.

#1 – Your approach: How should I prepare to receive God’s Word?

Remember the Bible is **God’s special revelation of Himself** (2 Tim. 3:16-17; 2 Pet. 1:19-21).

- The Bible is:
 - *Inspired* - God-given truth through imperfect authors (2 Pet. 1:20-21; 2 Tim. 3:16)
 - *Inerrant* - wholly true in what it teaches (John 17:17)
 - *Infallible* - unable to fail; will accomplish its purpose (Isa 55:11; Matt 5:18)
 - *Insistent* - authoritative because God speaks (Mark 7:8-9)
 - *Insightful* - able to illuminate truth and the heart (Heb. 4:12)
 - *Indestructible* - eternal and can’t be destroyed (Matt. 24:35, 1 Pet 1:23, 25)
 - *Immutable* - unchanging and sufficient to live a God-pleasing life (Ps. 119:89, Matt 5:18, Jn 10:35)
 - *Indispensable* - necessary for growth (Matt. 4:4, 1 Pet. 2:2)

Prepare to receive it **with prayer** (Ps. 119:5, 18; Eph. 1:16-18; Col. 1:9-12; James 1:5), **high respect** (Is. 66:1-2; 1 Thess. 2:13), a **humble readiness to be judged and transformed** (Heb. 4:12; John 17:17; Jas 1:21-25).

#2 – Your Observation: What does the Bible say?

Remember that Scripture is only understood through **the eyes of faith** (1 Cor. 2:10-15; Col. 2:3) and the **illumination of the Holy Spirit** (Jn 14:26; 1 Cor. 2:10-13; Ps. 119:130).

- Read the Scripture **slowly** and **repeatedly**.
 - **Ask questions** - who, what, when, where, why, how
 - **Look for** connecting words (*and, but, if, for, because, therefore, in, into, with, in order that*), verbs, repeated words, related concepts, comparisons (things similar), contrasts (things different), cause and effect, warnings, lists, commands, promises, questions,

answers, problems, solutions, missing things, main points, cultural clues, statements about God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit.

- **Record your observations** for further study

#3 – Your interpretation: What does the Bible mean?

Remember that the goal is to understand **the author's intent** which has **only one meaning** in each text (with multiple possible applications).

- Recognize the rules of interpretation:
 - **Literal** - take the text at face value unless there is sufficient cause to take it otherwise.
 - **Grammatical** - look at words, syntax, context, and genre for keys to understanding the meaning.
 - **Historical** - the time, place, language, and culture provide helpful insight.
 - **Correlated** - Scripture agrees with itself, so interpret Scripture with other Scripture. The unclear passages are understood in light of the clear passages.
- The **golden rule of interpretation** states: *"When the plain sense of Scripture makes common sense, seek no other sense; therefore, take every word at its primary, ordinary, usual, literal meaning unless the facts of the immediate context, studies in the light of related passages and axiomatic and fundamental truths indicate clearly otherwise."* (David L. Cooper)
- Research **within** God's Word using cross-references and concordances.
- Research **outside** God's Word using dictionaries, encyclopedias, and commentaries. Request help as needed from others (pastors, trusted and mature Christian family/friends, etc.)

#4 – Your application: How does the Bible apply to my life?

Remember that God's Word is written **to change your life** personally and specifically in how you think, believe, emote, speak, and do (James 1:22; 2 Tim. 3:15-17).

- Respond to God's Word by renewing your mind by it:
 - **Memorize** Scripture (Deut. 11:18; Psalm 119:11, 16; Matt. 4:4, 7, 10).
 - **Meditate** on precepts and principles (Josh. 1:8; Psalm 1:2; Luke 2:19; 1 Tim. 2:7).
- Respond to God's Word by conforming your life to it:
 - **Obey** it in faith, by the power of the Spirit (Mt. 7:21; 2 Cor. 5:5-10; Jas. 1:22).
 - **Be motivated** by love for God and His glory (Matt 5:16; John 14:15; 1 Cor 10:31).

#5 – Your communication: Who should I share this truth with?

Remember that God's Word comes with a **privilege and obligation** (2 Cor. 1:3-4) to **understand, believe, and proclaim** it to one's self before others (Matt. 7:1-5).

- Reveal the truth of God's Word to others by:
 - Visibly **living** it out
 - Verbally **proclaiming it** (Deut. 6:1-9; Ezra 7:10; Matt. 28:19-20; Phil. 2:16; 2 Tim. 2:2)
 - **Warning others** not to ignore it (Gen. 3:1-6; 1 Sam. 15:23; John 12:48-49)