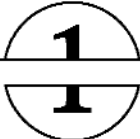

CUTTING IT  **STRAIGHT** *How to Study the Bible*

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1 *How to Study the Bible*

CUTTING IT STRAIGHT

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CUTTING IT STRAIGHT - LEVEL 1

HOW TO STUDY THE BIBLE

I. Why Study the Bible?

The Bible is God's written revelation to man. It is verbally inspired in every word, and absolutely inerrant in the original documents. In the Scriptures are contained the very mind and thoughts of God, as well as the will of God for your life. As you continue to grow as a true worshipper of God, you will need to become familiar with what He has left as the divinely inspired guide for your life, and as the source of absolute authority.

The Word of God itself testifies to its own importance. We are reminded in 2 Timothy 3:16-17 that

All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.

As a result, you can be confident that the Word of God is the sufficient source of wisdom and practical instruction.

The Word of God will guide and train you in your Christian life, and provide you with truth. We will never truly know anything if we are not getting our knowledge from what God has revealed in His Word. It is the independent source of truth (John 17:17).

The Word of God will never cease to give up riches to the one who faithfully pursues the knowledge of it, coupled with obedience to it. Should you be able to live a hundred lifetimes, you could not exhaustively plumb its depths.

Nobody ever outgrows Scripture: the book widens and deepens with our years.

Charles Spurgeon

II. What is the Message of the Bible?

In the preface to *The MacArthur Study Bible*, John MacArthur gives the following synopsis of the theme and purpose of the Scriptures:

There is one God. The Bible has one Creator. It is one book. It has one plan of grace, recorded from initiation, through execution, to consummation. From predestination to glorification, the Bible is the story of God redeeming His chosen people for the praise of His glory.

As God's redemptive purposes and plan unfold in Scripture, 5 recurring motifs are constantly emphasized:

1. The character of God
2. The judgment for sin and disobedience
3. The blessing for faith and obedience
4. The Lord Savior and sacrifice for sin
5. The coming kingdom and glory

As you pursue a better understanding of the Scriptures, keep these basic motifs in mind. In all your reading, ask yourself what the passage is teaching you about the nature and attributes of God Himself. Watch for consistent themes of judgment for disobedience and blessings for obedience. Apply the truths found in the Word to your life and learn how to obey more consistently. Always remember who effected your salvation, and rejoice in the fact that someday He will return for you.

III. What is the Structure of the Bible?

A. Old Testament Introduction:

1. The main flow of the Old Testament can be seen in the following way:
 - a. Creation
 - b. Fall (Adam, Eve, Cain, Abel, Seth)
 - c. Flood (Noah and family)
 - d. Nations (Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph)
 - e. Exile (Egypt) – 430 years

- f. Exodus (Wilderness) – 40 years
 - g. Conquest (Canaan) – 7 years
 - h. Judges – 350 years
 - i. United Kingdom (Saul, David, Solomon) – 110 years
 - j. Divided Kingdom (Judah/Israel) – 350 years
 - k. Exile (Babylon) – 70 years
 - l. Return (Rebuilding) – 140 years
2. The books of the Old Testament are divided into the following categories:
- a. The Law (Genesis – Deuteronomy)
 - b. History (Joshua – Esther)
 - c. Wisdom (Job – Song of Solomon)
 - d. Major Prophets (Isaiah – Daniel)
 - e. Minor Prophets (Hosea – Malachi)

B. New Testament Introduction

- 1. The gospel accounts of Christ present the manifestation of the incarnate Son of God.
 - a. The gospel proclaimed in Jerusalem to the Jews.
 - b. The gospel proclaimed in Judea and Samaria.
 - c. The gospel proclaimed to the Gentiles.
 - d. The gospel proclaimed to the center of the then-known world (Rome).
- 2. Acts of the Apostles presents the expansion of the gospel message, and was written to strengthen and correct the doctrine in the churches.
- 3. The Epistles
- 4. Revelation presents the culmination of God's redemptive plan for both Israel and the church in the eternal

state.

- a. Christ is victorious over Satan.
- b. Christ is crowned as King.

IV. How Do I Study the Bible?

A. Prepare Your Heart to Study

1. The Reasons for Preparation

- a. We are trying to understand the mind and heart of an infinite and all-wise God.

1 Corinthians 2:11-14

For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so the thoughts of God no one knows except the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may know the things freely given to us by God, which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words. But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised.

Isaiah 55:8-9

"For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways," declares the LORD. "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways and My thoughts than your thoughts."

- b. We are called to be good stewards of the mysteries of God, not those who speak and say whatever we choose for our own benefit.

1 Corinthians 4:1-2

Let a man regard us in this manner, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. In this case, moreover, it is required of stewards that one be found trustworthy.

FOOTNOTE

If you teach, your words will either be life and health to some or will be like a disease and a fire (cf. also James 3:1-12; Ezekiel 22:23-28, esp. 28).

2 Timothy 2:15-18

Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth. But avoid worldly and empty chatter, for it will lead to further ungodliness, and their talk will spread like gangrene. Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus, men who have gone astray from the truth saying that the resurrection has already taken place, and they upset the faith of some.

2. The Essentials for Preparation

a. Prayer

- i. In light of who we are and what we are trying to do, we should not pray just because we think it would be good to pray, but rather because it is necessary to pray.
- ii. Look at the prayers of the psalmist in Psalm 119 as a model.
 - Oh that my ways may be established to keep Your statutes!... I shall keep Your statutes; Do not forsake me utterly! (vv. 5, 8)
 - With all my heart I have sought You; Do not let me wander from Your commandments. (v. 10)
 - Open my eyes, that I may behold wonderful things from Your law. (v. 18; cf. also Eph 1:18-19)
 - Teach me Your statutes. Make me understand the way of Your precepts.... Remove the false way from me, and graciously grant me Your law. (vv. 26b-27, 29)
 - Teach me, O LORD, the way of Your statutes, and I shall observe it to the end. Give me understanding, that I may observe Your law And keep it with all my heart. Make me walk in the path of Your commandments, for I delight in it.

Incline my heart to Your testimonies and not to *dishonest* gain. Turn away my eyes from looking at vanity, and revive me in Your ways. Establish Your word to Your servant, as that which produces reverence for You. Turn away my reproach which I dread, for Your ordinances are good. Behold, I long for Your precepts; Revive me through Your righteousness. (vv. 33-40)

Therefore, the psalmist's major theme of applied Bibliology is also quite conspicuous in [verses 33-40]; his 'earnest desire is to make God's law the governing principle of his conduct.' At least two subthemes interact with this major emphasis.... One of them, indicated by the nine imperatives functioning as channels for passionate pleas, spotlights the disciple's acute awareness of his total dependence. The other one...identifies his consuming burden—he is in desperate need of Divine guidance (*The Word of God in the Child of God*, pp. 133-34; emphasis added).

George Zemek

b. Purity

You cannot ever hope to understand the Word of God unless you deal with and repent from the sin in your life beforehand.

James 1:21

Therefore, putting aside all filthiness and all that remains of wickedness, in humility receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls.

c. Perspective

Studying is not an end in itself. There is a purpose for the study. You are not a spiritual a cul de sac.

i. Personally apply the things you learn.

James 1:22

But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers.

ii. Seek to be an encouragement to others with what you learn.

B. Examine the Passage

1. Read the text. As much as possible, try and understand the author's intent in what he is writing.
 - a. Familiarize yourself with as much of the surrounding context as possible.
 - i. With an epistle, this would include the whole book.
 - ii. With a psalm, this would include the whole psalm.
 - iii. With an Old Testament or New Testament narrative, this would include the full section in which your passage is found.
 - b. Familiarize yourself as much as possible with the specific text you want to study (i.e. once a day for 30 days).
 - i. Noting major themes
 - ii. Noting content
 - iii. Noting truths to remember
 - iv. Noting questions to research
2. Make observations
 - a. Observe the passage literally

Observing the passage literally is to take what is said in the verse or passage at face value. This is important because it establishes two very important aspects of Bible study.

- i. Foundations for interpretation

This will provide us with the necessary raw data to interpret correctly.

TOOLS

- ⇒ Bible (ESV, NASB, NKJV, NIV) preferably without notes
- ⇒ Pen and Paper or Word Processor

ii. Formula for objectivity

This will force us to limit our interpretations to what is actually said in the text, avoiding subjective interpretation based on “what this verse says to me.”

b. Observing the passage comprehensively/connectedly

Nothing in Scripture is going to operate in a vacuum. No truth or message at one point in the Scriptures will contradict a truth at another point.

example

Whenever a later writer refers to Noah, we know what that entails, and no writer will say that the events did not occur.

C. Research the Historical Context

1. Know the people involved in your passage.

a. For Historical Narrative

i. Who is/are the main character(s)?

ii. Try to describe each character as fully as possible with the information that is given.

example

Luke 10:38-42

There are three main characters in this passage:

1. Jesus Christ

- a. He was travelling with the disciples (v. 38), He entered a certain village (v. 38), and He was welcomed by Martha (v. 38).
- b. He was speaking or teaching (v. 39), and He was sitting (v. 39).
- c. He responded to Martha’s question (vv. 41-42).

2. Martha

- a. She welcomed Jesus Christ (v. 38), and the house is said to be hers (v. 38).
- b. She had a sister named Mary (v. 39).
- c. She was distracted with all her preparations (v. 40), asked Jesus a question (v. 40), and understood His authority (v. 40).
- d. She is described as being worried about many things (v. 41).

3. Mary

- a. She was Martha's sister.
- b. She was listening to the Lord's words, seated at His feet (v. 39).
- c. She chose the "good part" (v. 42).

b. For Epistles

- i. Who is the author?
- ii. Who is/are the recipients of the epistle?

Ephesians**example**

1. Author: Paul
 - a. He was an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God (1:1).
 - b. He saw himself as a prisoner of Christ Jesus (3:1).
 - c. He was a minister of the gospel to the Gentiles (3:7-8).
 - d. He was the very least of all saints (3:8).
2. Recipients: Believers in Ephesus
 - a. Called "saints" (1:1).
 - b. Called "faithful" (1:1).
 - c. Described to be "in Ephesus" (1:1).

2. Know the Place or the Geographical Setting**example**

1. Paul wrote Ephesians during his 1st imprisonment.
2. Paul wrote 2 Timothy from Rome during his 2nd imprisonment right before his death.
3. David wrote Psalm 63 from the wilderness of Judah.

3. Know the Chronology**example**

1. First Peter was written around the time of the reign of Nero.
2. The events of Mark 3:13-5:43 all occurred during one day.

4. Know the Cultural Context**example**

1. Paul's prison in 2 Timothy was a sewage storage tank. When the prison cell was full, the guards would open the sewage inlet and have the cell filled with sewage.
2. Women and children during the time of 1 Peter had no rights of their own. Women were treated as property.

TOOLS

- ⇒ Donald Guthrie - *New Testament Introduction*
- ⇒ Edmond Hiebert - *An Introduction to the New Testament (3 vols.)*

NOTE

One cannot fully appreciate the structural integrity of a building just by looking at the building. Getting an overall picture of the building is just the beginning. Examining the specific materials from which the building was made will allow you to acquire a firm grasp of the wonders found within.

CAUTION

The key to a passage is not going to be found in a word study alone!

D. Analyze the Text: Words and Phrases

1. The passage you are studying will contain clues that aid in your overall understanding of the verse(s). These clues are found in the specific words and phrases of the passage which must be examined in order to gain a solid grasp on the passage as a whole.
2. There are four key grammatical elements to identify in your passage: key words, synonyms/antonyms, repeated terms, and key phrases.

a. Key Words

A **key word** is a word which, if removed, leaves the passage devoid of meaning.

example

1. Ephesians 2:1 - "And you were dead in your **trespasses** and **sins**"
2. Ephesians 2:5 - "even when we were dead in our **transgressions**"

b. Synonyms and Antonyms

- i. **Synonyms** are different words that have the same basic meaning (like *large* and *big*, *sin* and *transgression*)

example

In Galatians 2:15-18, the words "sinners" (v.15, 17) and "transgressor" (v. 18) are used.

Note: Although these synonyms are not found within the same verse, Paul uses them within the same thought.

- ii. **Antonyms** are words whose meanings are opposites of one another (like *big* and *small*, *life* and *death*)

c. Repeated Terms

Repetition is a signal of possible significance.

example

"you were **dead**" - Eph. 2:1

"we were **dead**" - Eph. 2:5

"you formerly **walked**" - Eph. 2:2

"we would **walk**" - Eph. 2:10

d. Key Phrases

Key phrases are phrases that appear repeatedly or which are significant.

example

"in Christ Jesus" - Eph. 2:6, 7, 10

This phrase is an example of a phrase which is both significant and repeated.

E. Determine the Structure of the Passage

1. Identify the propositions

A **proposition** is an assertion or statement about something which has both a subject and a predicate.

a. Identify the propositions

example

Ephesians 2:1-10:

"We lived among them" (v. 3)

"We were children of wrath" (v. 3)

"He loved us with great love" (v. 4)

"God made us alive, raised us up, seated us" (v. 5,6)

"He might show His grace" (v. 7)

"You have been saved" (v. 8)

"We are His workmanship" (v. 10)

b. Identify the subject, verb, and object (if there is one) of the propositions in the passage.

2. Identify the relationships between the propositions

a. Identify the conjunctions within the passage

- i. **Conjunctions** are the key to determining the relationships between the propositions; they are the signposts that tell you which way the movement of the passage is going.

ii. Some key conjunctions:

| <u>Conjunction</u> | <u>What It Indicates</u> |
|--------------------|-----------------------------------|
| "But" | contrast |
| "For" | proof or grounds for an assertion |
| "In order that" | purpose |
| "Therefore" | conclusion or inference |

| example | |
|--------------------|--|
| contrast: | You were dead in your sins, but now you are alive in Christ. |
| proof: | You will be saved from your sins, for God has promised salvation to all who believe. |
| purpose: | God has saved you in order that He may display His grace. |
| conclusion: | God has saved you unto holiness; therefore be holy as He Himself is holy. |

b. Identify what kind of relationship exists between the propositions

Two kinds of relationships exist between propositions:

i. **Subordinate** — Subordinate propositions do not stand alone, are dependent, and support the main proposition.

| example |
|---|
| " Since I ate the potato chips last night, I feel sluggish." If I did not eat the potato chips, I would not feel sluggish. Thus, feeling sluggish is dependent upon having eaten the potato chips. |

ii. **Coordinate** — Two independent propositions which are linked by a conjunction and are not in a subordinate relationship.

| example |
|--|
| "I watched the football game and ate potato chips." According to the grammar of the sentence, I could have watched the football game and not eaten chips or eaten chips while watching something else. Thus, the two propositions are independent of each other. |

3. Summary

- a. Looking for the propositions is a great way to grasp the argument of the passage.
- b. Working hard to find the propositions is another way to get into the text, to wrestle with it, and to get a good grip on it.
- c. Look for conjunctions. They will give you the key to the argument or flow of the passage. Look for contrasts, proofs, conclusions, inferences, etc.

F. Consider Biblical Cross-References

1. A **cross-reference** is another passage of Scripture that gives added information about the issue in the passage being studied.

- a. Why use cross-references?
 - i. Because the greatest interpreter of Scripture is Scripture itself (the analogy of Scripture).
 - ii. Because it gives a broader understanding of Scripture.

- No biblical truth is isolated from the rest of Scripture.

People love to see the big picture. They want to know how everything fits together. It is sometimes difficult for them to grasp a truth presented in isolation.... Cross-references help sink truths deeply into your people's consciousness.

John MacArthur

- The parts take on meaning in light of the whole.

You very rarely have to go outside of the Bible to explain anything in the Bible.

Donald Grey Barnhouse

- iii. Because it guards against error in interpretation.

No part of Scripture can be interpreted in such a way as to render it in conflict with what is clearly taught elsewhere in Scripture.

R.C. Sproul

example

If you come to 1 Corinthians 15:29, where Paul talks about the baptism for the dead, it might be easy to conclude that it is possible to be baptized for a dead person and that will save them. But is that really the correct interpretation? Does the Bible really allow for that? Using the cross-reference technique shows that this interpretation is impossible since it contradicts what the rest of the Bible says about salvation.

- b. What are some guidelines for using cross-references?
 - i. Focus on meaningful cross-references that add to the understanding of the issue in the passage being studied.
 - ii. Make sure the cross-references that are used fit within the context they are taken from.
 - Avoid proof-texting — i.e. importing the meaning of one passage into another
 - Handle each passage as a separate entity
 - iii. Start with the book the passage is in, then move to other books by the same author, then to the same testament, then to the whole Bible.

2. There are various methods of cross-referencing.

- a. Trace how a word is used in the Bible.

Focus on a key word and find out how it is used throughout the Scriptures.

example**"walked" from Ephesians 2:2**

Same Book - Eph 2:10; 4:1, 17; 5:2, 8, 15

Same Author - Gal 5:16, 25; 6:16; Phil 3:17-18; Col 1:10; 2:6

Same Testament - 1 John 1:6-7; 2:6; 2 John 6

- b. Trace a biblical truth through the Bible

Identify a key principle and trace it through the Bible

example**"raised us up with Him" from Ephesians 2:6**

Same Book - Eph 1:20

Same Author - Rom 6:5; Col 2:12-13; 3:1

Same Testament - 1 Peter 1:21

3. Some helpful tools for cross-referencing exist.

- a. Bible Margin
 b. Strong's *Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*
 c. *The Treasury of Scripture Knowledge*

example**Ephesians 2:2**

2 in time. 4:22 Job 31:7 Ac 19:35 1Co 6:11 Col 1:21 3:7
 1Pe 4:3 1Jo 5:19 walked according. Ps 17:14 Jer 23:10 Lu
 16:8 Joh 7:7 8:23 15:19 Ro 12:2 1Co 5:10 Ga 1:4 2Ti 4:10
 Jas 1:7 4:4 1Jo 2:15-17 5:4 the prince. 6:12 Joh 8:44
 12:31 14:30 16:11 1Jo 5:19 Re 12:9 13:8,14 20:2 of the
 air. Job 1:7,16,19 Re 16:17 the spirit. Mt 12:43-45 Lu
 11:21-26 22:2,3,31 Joh 13:2,27 Ac 5:3 2Co 4:4 1Jo 3:8
 4:4

- d. Nave's Topical Bible

example**"grace" (Ephesians 2:5, 7, 8) - GRACE OF GOD**

| | | |
|------------------|-----------------|-------------------|
| John 17:11,12,15 | Acts 4:29,30 | Acts 26:22 |
| Rom 3:22-24 | Rom 4:4,16 | Rom 5:2,6-8,15-21 |
| Rom 9:10-16 | Rom 11:5,6 | 1 Cor 1:4-8 |
| 1 Cor 10:13 | 1 Cor 15:10 | 2 Cor 1:12 |
| Gal 1:14,16 | Eph 1:5-9,11,12 | Eph 2:8,9 |
| Eph 3:16 | Eph 4:7 | Eph 6:10 |
| Phil 1:19 | Phil 2:13 | 1 Thess 1:1; 5:2 |
| 2 Pet 1:2 | 1 Tim 1:14 | 2 Tim 1:1,9 |
| Tit 3:7 | 1 Pet 1:5 | 1 Pet 4:10 |

G. Consult Commentaries

1. Commentaries can be extremely helpful in interpreting a passage.
 - a. Understand the benefits of commentaries.
 - i. Allows us to profit from the in-depth study and scholarship of others.
 - ii. Helps us to come at the text from a different viewpoint.
 - iii. Helps us to check the results of our study.
 - iv. Shows us areas we have left out in our study.
 - b. Recognize the dangers of commentaries.
 - i. They can become a crutch for not studying the Scriptures ourselves. Therefore, they should be used as the last step.
 - ii. They are not infallible and thus can have interpretations that are not correct.
 - iii. They sometimes skip over what appear to be crucial issues and questions.
2. There are some important guidelines for using commentaries.
 - a. If just getting started with this process, use a single volume general commentary.
 - i. *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary*
 - ii. *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*
 - b. For those more advanced, use in-depth, exegetical commentaries which deal with grammar, etc.
 - i. *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*
 - ii. *New Testament Commentary*

H. Apply the Text

1. Application is the process whereby the truth that has been discovered is made relevant to life situations. It is a crucial step:

- a. Because Scripture is for application not just information.

The Bible was not written to satisfy your curiosity; it was written to transform your life. The ultimate goal of Bible study, then, is not to do something to the Bible, but to allow the Bible to do something to you, so truth becomes tangent to life.

Howard Hendricks

- b. Because simply "understanding" the text is not the end goal for Bible study...the focus must culminate in application.

Bible study...can degenerate into a process that's intellectually fascinating but spiritually frustrating. You can get mentally excited by the truth, yet fail to be morally changed by it.... Our task, then, is two-sided. First, we must get into the Word of God for ourselves. But then we must allow that Word to get into us, to make a permanent difference in our character and conduct.

Howard Hendricks

2. There are some important guidelines to follow when applying a text.

- a. Summarize the biblical truth.

Identify the main message the author is seeking to convey to his readers.

Ephesians 2:1-10

example

Paul shows that those who were once dead in sin (1-3) have been made alive by God (4-6) to display His glory and live holy lives (7-10).

- b. Identify specific commands and principles to follow

Ask what overall principles of action and thought can be derived from the passage and applied to any cultural situation.

example

7 Key Questions to Ask:

1. Are there examples to follow?
2. Are there commands to obey?
3. Are there errors to avoid?
4. Are there sins to forsake?
5. Are there promises to claim?
6. Are there new thoughts about God?
7. Are there principles to live by?

example

Ephesians 2:1-10

New thoughts about God - Believers must think rightly about their salvation. God did not primarily save believers for their own purposes but for the purpose of receiving glory for Himself for all of eternity (v. 7).

Principles to live by - When tempted to boast about something they've accomplished, believers must remember that it was nothing they did to receive their salvation (v. 9).

- c. Meditate on the truths learned.
- i. Take time to think about what was learned and what changes should be made.
 - ii. Meditation also involves prayerfully asking God to reveal what changes should be made.

True meditation is pondering the truth with a view to letting it help and readjust our lives.

Howard Hendricks

- d. Practice the truth.
- i. Write down specific applications based on the passage studied.
 - ii. Ask, "What must be done today to apply this truth?"

3. Remember the characteristics of good application.
 - a. Specific

Avoid application that is too general to put into practice.
 - b. Achievable

Avoid application that is not practically feasible.
 - c. Measurable

Develop applications so that there will be a clear indication when they are achieved or not.



CROSSROADS

a ministry of grace community church
13248 roscoe boulevard
sun valley, california
91352

T 818.909.5533

F 818.909.5523

www.crossroadsministry.net