

# Understanding and Teaching the Bible

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## Why do we study the Bible?

What do the following passages teach us about studying the Bible?

- John 5:39-40
- James 1:22-25
- 2 Peter 3:15-18
- 2 Tim 3:14-17

Trying to break some of this down into steps:



What happens if we do just steps:

- 1?
- 1 and 2?

What happens if we try to jump straight to step:

- 2?
- 3?

How much time should we spend on each step?

- If teaching Sunday school
- In a church sermon
- In a midweek Bible study
- When reading the Bible 1:1
- In an evangelistic talk

# A. Observation - What does it say?

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## 1. Understand the words

- vocabulary (e.g. Matt 5:13)
- history / historical context (e.g. Ruth 1:1)
- geography (e.g. book of Acts)
- genre

→ this is why I *always* use a commentary – to check I've not misunderstood something by getting a word wrong, misunderstanding historical context etc.

e.g. ESV study Bible  
NIV Biblical Theology Study Bible  
New Bible Commentary  
<https://www.thegoodbook.co.uk/bible-study/the-commentary-list/>

→ *beware* of online resources! Some are good, many are not.

## 2. Observe literary features

- imagery
- tone and feel
- surprises
- repeated words / themes
- characters

## 3. Try to understand the structure

(note: not all these elements will be present each time – the key is to spot them when they ARE present)

- linking words / flow of an argument
- turning points in narrative / flow of a story
- narrator's comments

*Which of the above 'tools' of observation are most helpful to get to the heart of the passage?*

**\*\*\*Doing observation – being a 'tour guide'\*\*\***

## B. Meaning

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### How do we get to meaning?

#### Some questions that are always good questions

- What do we learn about God?
- What do we learn about his salvation?
- What do we learn about how to live?

### Author's purpose

We want to know why the author/speaker wrote/said this. What is the unique contribution of this passage? Why is it here? What would we lack if it wasn't here?

We'll discover the author's purpose through

- observing well (looking for surprises, repeated themes, emphasis etc.)
- looking for explicit purpose statements
- reading the passage in context – in the flow of the story/argument

### Context

The same truths can be put to different purposes – context shows this

	Theme of verse (main point)	Purpose (from context) i.e. Main application
Mark 10:45		
1 Peter 3:18		
1 Cor 15:3-5		

### Immediate context

### Wider context of the book – 'melodic line'

### Context of the whole Bible

## What about narratives?

Usually Bible narratives don't teach any new doctrine or moral truth

e.g. Naaman (2 Kings 5)

→ how is this powerful?

→ how should this affect how we 'teach' narratives?

## Moving from what it meant for *them then*, to *us now*.

- Distinguish timeless principles from specific application

e.g. Deu 22:8

'When you build a new house, make a parapet around your roof so that you may not bring the guilt of bloodshed on your house if someone falls from the roof.'

- What is the timeless principle here?
- What might be a contemporary application of this law?

- Read in the light of Biblical Theology

e.g. The temple in Haggai 1:3-4

'Then the word of the Lord came through the prophet Haggai: "Is it a time for you yourselves to be living in your panelled houses, while this house remains a ruin?"'

- How is this often applied today?
- How does 1 Peter 2:4-5 shape how we might apply it?

key principle: the closer our situation is to the situation of original readers, the more similar the meaning for us will be as it was for them
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→ for more help on this see 'God's big picture' by Vaughan Roberts

## C. Application

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Remember the three stages in understanding/teaching the Bible:



Why don't we apply well?

### 3 types of application

- Head
- Heart
- Hands

### Ways to apply well

Let our application be determined by what the passage is saying

Let our application be determined by the people who we are teaching

Let truths about God be the motivation for any action we are to do

### Be concrete and specific

*Consider how specific many of Jesus's instructions are in the sermon on the Mount: Don't be angry (Matt 5:22); don't lust (5:28); give up your coat (5:40); go two miles (5:41). Jesus meant for people to put his words into action in specific tangible ways. Our problem is that we think it is enough just to grasp general concepts as if taking in the Word of God is a mental exercise. Jesus, rather, meant our interaction with the Word to be a life exercise. (...) Applications often should be tangible, measurable and specific.*

George Guthrie, *Read the Bible for Life*, 66.

*By our lack of application of the Word in meaningful ways, we are sending a message to the world that reads, 'Christianity really is irrelevant to life.'*

George Guthrie, *Read the Bible for Life*, 67

## Doing good application in Bible studies

### Ways to kill application in a Bible study

- lack of .....
- lack of .....
- lack of .....
- too much .....

How not to do it:

### Ways of helping with application

- scenarios
- quotes to discuss in light of the passage
- ask questions that get to our attitudes and feeling
- don't just talk and think – *do!*
- think through application and *non-application*