

How to Study the Bible

Lesson #7—Coming Down the Mountain

In the book of Exodus, after leaving Egypt, God brought His people to the foot of Mt. Sinai. There He made His presence known with thunder and lightning, so much so that the people trembled in fear and dared not approach. However, God called one man, Moses, to approach.

Exodus 19:20

²⁰ The LORD came down on Mount Sinai, to the top of the mountain; and the LORD called Moses to the top of the mountain, and Moses went up.

This was the closest any person had been to God at that point. Later we learn that God called Moses to come up and remain with Him on the mountain for forty days, where God was to give him the stone tablets with the law. Of course, this first trip up the mountain was marred by the Israelites, who quickly turned to idolatry in Moses' absence, worshipping a golden calf. The two tablets were destroyed and many Israelites were judged. But God dealt graciously with Israel, preserved His covenant, and called Moses back up the mountain for another forty days. The two tablets were replaced. Only this time, as Moses came back down the mountain, something changed.

Exodus 34:29

²⁹ It came about when Moses was coming down from Mount Sinai (and the two tablets of the testimony were in Moses' hand as he was coming down from the mountain), that Moses did not know that the skin of his face shone because of his speaking with Him.

When Moses came down the mountain after being with God and receiving His word, he was changed. Something was different about him. What was it? It wasn't hard to see—his face was shining. He was glowing like a light bulb. What happened? As mentioned in 2 Corinthians 3, Moses so encountered the glory of God that it rubbed off on him, so to speak. He came so close to God that he was left changed. God's glory began to be reflected in Moses.

There is of course more to this passage of Scripture, but there is also an object lesson here. As you encounter God, as you draw close to Him through His word and behold His glory, it will leave you changed. You can't help it; God's power through His word changes lives. Today, your skin won't start glowing, but you will start living in the light as a result. You will start to reflect the glory of God in your life.

This is the end goal of Bible study. Through studying God's word, you have been drawing near. You have been climbing the mountain and seeing more of His glory. But this, done with the right heart, can and should leave you changed. Practical application sits at the end of the road.

This “How to Study the Bible” series is not intended as a guide to procuring more head knowledge. Rather God’s word is meant to enter your mind, then fill your heart, then move your hands and feet. Studying the Bible should have a real impact on how you live before God.

So far, this guide has helped you labor to read, study, and interpret the Bible. You want to get the message right and find out what God is saying. But once you have done this, you are left with a final question—So what? You have studied a Bible passage, found its meaning, but so what? What does that have to do with you? Of course, the answer is “a whole lot,” but now you must do a little extra work to answer that “so what” question. You need to take some final steps to rightly apply the word. That is the goal of this final lesson.

Step #11—Apply

Throughout church history, there has always been a divide over how people approach the faith. Some swing to the side of knowledge. Christianity to them is all about learning and knowing God intellectually. They seek to fill their heads and worship through contemplation. On the other side are those who pursue experience. Christianity is all about practical holiness and they desire to spend less time learning, and more time doing. Hopefully it is obvious that there is merit to both sides. This does not have to be an either/or proposition. Knowledge is so important. You cannot shun knowledge. You must know the truth. God places a high premium on His people seeking and knowing the truth.

Colossians 1:9–10

⁹ For this reason also, since the day we heard of it, we have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, ¹⁰ so that you will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God;

At the same time though, you cannot stop with knowledge. Knowledge of God is not the end goal, but is meant to take you even further to personal holiness and worship. The truth changes lives; that’s the power of God’s word. Scripture itself actually builds the case for such practical application of truth to life.

Matthew 7:24–27

²⁴ “Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine and acts on them, may be compared to a wise man who built his house on the rock. ²⁵ “And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and yet it did not fall, for it had been founded on the rock. ²⁶ “Everyone who hears these words of Mine and does not act on them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. ²⁷ “The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and it fell—and great was its fall.”

John 13:17

¹⁷ *"If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them.*

Luke 11:28

²⁸ *But He said, "On the contrary, blessed are those who hear the word of God and observe it."*

James 1:22

²² *But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves.*

James makes the right approach crystal clear—be both a hearer and a doer.

So far, this guide has been focused on being a "hearer." It has been very scholastic and learning-oriented. This has been on purpose though because practical application must be driven by theological implication. Before you can ask, "What does this text mean to me?" you must know, "What does this text mean?" Now though, trusting you have rightly divided the word, you can apply it to life today.

The next question then is how. How do you apply the Bible? How do you find the right applications? What should you look for? Again, Scripture itself gives some guidance.

2 Timothy 3:16–17

¹⁶ *All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness;* ¹⁷ *so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.*

2 Timothy 4:2

² *preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction.*

The Bible is inspired and given by God not just for reading. Teaching isn't even an end to itself. Instead there are reproofing, correcting, and training functions to Scripture. God's word equips believers for all good works, enabling them to serve the Lord according to His will in any and all circumstances. It is, in essence, a guide to right living before the Lord.

Roy B. Zuck gives an excellent display of how Christians are to respond to God's word, derived from a study of Psalm 119 (see *Basic Bible Interpretation*, p.280):

In Psalm 119 the psalmist used many verbs to speak of his response to God's Word: walk according to, keep, obey, follow, trust in, seek out, delight in, meditate on, consider, rejoice in, see, understand, hope in, teach, speak of, remember, not forget, not forsake, not depart from, not stray from, not turn from, believe in, long for, love, stand in awe of, tremble at, sing of, and choose.

This is an excellent rubric for application. You are essentially asking of the text, what is God telling you to do? However, to avoid error, you are rooting your answer in the text, specifically the timeless truth. In lesson 6, you made one sentence summaries of the text's intent and then the timeless truth being taught.

Now, to apply the text, you want to restate the timeless truth in a personalized way, drawing out the prescribed actions. Ask of the text and timeless truth: Are there examples to follow? Commands to obey? Errors to avoid? Sins to forsake? Promises to claim? New thoughts to ponder? Principles to live by?

Your goal here is to now create a one sentence summary of the text's application. This time phrase the sentence in the first person, singular or plural (i.e. "me" or "us").

Text	Text's Intent	Timeless Truth	Text's Application
Ephesians 5:22-33	Paul instructed the Ephesians that there is a reciprocating relationship between marriage and the gospel.	There is a reciprocating relationship between marriage and the gospel.	God wants us to reflect gospel truth in our marriages.
1 John 1:5-7	John is writing to Christians so that they may have fellowship with the God who is light, which depends on having an accurate view of and response to sin.	To have fellowship with the God who is light, you must have a biblical view of and response to sin.	God wants us to pursue lives of holiness and deal with our sin rightly when we fall short.
Joshua 1:1-9	Joshua writes concerning himself how he was to lead God's people in obeying God, yet with strength and courage because of God's promises and faithfulness.	The people of God can have strength and courage to serve Him obediently because of His faithfulness.	God wants us to serve Him in obedience in whatever He calls us to do with strength and courage, remembering His past faithfulness.
Job 1-2	Moses writes to Israel to show how Job's righteousness kept him from sinning, but not from suffering, and to show that the servant of God will accept both good and bad from God, yet still worship Him.	God's righteous sovereignty uses perceived evil.	God wants us to know and take comfort in the fact that He is completely supreme and sovereign over all things, even evil.

Of course, you don't want to stop with just writing out a sentence of application. It is left to you to bring this application to bear on your life.

Step #12—Implement

Getting to the point of deriving the text's intended application is a significant step. So much work has been done to get you this far. However, there is one final step that can't be skipped, implementation, where you are taking the text's application and actually carrying it out in your own life. It is at this final point where the result can and will look different for different people.

By way of example, Ephesian 5:25 is a great text because the meaning and application are so direct. "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her." The application of this relatively simple command is clear—God wants husbands to sacrificially love their wives. So far so good. But if you are a husband, how are you actually going to do that? The Bible doesn't always or often spell out these implications, mostly because they are nearly infinite. Rather the Bible provides God's people with timeless truths and principles, which are left for each generation to apply and implement.

Now you must bridge the gap between the text's application and your own life and circumstances. Going back to the example, if you are a husband, you must think of ways to practically sacrificially lay down your life for your wife. Perhaps you have children and your wife stays at home, so you might need to sacrificially love her by watching the kids to give her some free, quiet time in the evenings. Or perhaps your wife has had a long and particularly stressful day and although you are also tired, you need to sacrificially love her by doing the dishes and cleaning up after dinner. Of course the answers here are limitless.

But at this final point, you should have written out the text's intent, the timeless truth, and the text's application. Now, going off the application, personalize it. Make a plan to carry out the application in your own life. What do you need to do? What are you going to do? When are you going to do this? How are you going to do this? The more specific you can get, the better.

Conclusion

This brings to an end this guide on how to study the Bible. All that's left is for you to apply what you have learned here overall. It's great to know how to study the Bible, just like it's great to know how to eat, but unless you actually consume the word, it will do you no good. So start to dig in to Scripture. Put into practice all that you have learned about rightly dividing the word, so that you may grow in respect to salvation.