



# READ SCRIPTURE WORKSHOP

## HOW TO READ A NEW TESTAMENT LETTER

To interpret the Bible literally means to interpret it according to what was the \_\_\_\_\_ by the original \_\_\_\_\_ to the original \_\_\_\_\_.

### GENRE

The term genre means \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, or \_\_\_\_\_.

The Bible is not one book, but a collection of \_\_\_\_\_ books of several different 'kinds' (or genres), written by various authors over approximately 1500 years.

### THE BIBLICAL GENRES ARE:

Legal (law), poetry & songs (psalms), letters (epistles), biographies (Gospels), proverbs, history, prophecy and apocalyptic.

The biblical genre we're dealing with in this workshop is that of the New Testament letters (epistles).

## THE COMMON STRUCTURE OF NEW TESTAMENT LETTERS

New Testament letters or epistles generally follow this common structure:

1. _____	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The name of the writer (e.g. Paul, James, etc)</li> <li>• The name of the recipient (e.g. to the church in Corinth)</li> <li>• A greeting (e.g. Grace and peace to you...) &amp; reason for writing</li> <li>• A prayer and/or thanksgiving (e.g. I always thank God for you...)</li> </ul>
2. _____	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This is the main content of the letter and generally contains 2 types of material:</li> </ul>
A. _____ DISCOURSE	expounds or describes certain truths or doctrines, often with logical support for those truths. This is also called indicative material.
B. _____ DISCOURSE	includes exhortations to follow certain courses of action or to develop certain characteristics in light of the truths presented in the descriptive discourse material. This is also called imperative material.
3. _____	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Most New Testament letters end with final instructions, a final greeting/farewell and sometimes a doxology.</li> </ul>

The epistles are all what is called "occasional documents" - that is, they arose out of and were intended for a specific occasion in the first century church. Understanding what was the occasion helps us put in context why the letter was written what the letter was meant to communicate.



# 3 BASIC PRINCIPLES FOR BIBLE STUDY

The correct flow of Bible study should be:



Application is \_\_\_\_\_ what you have already \_\_\_\_\_ at and \_\_\_\_\_ over.

We will be thinking of these 3 concepts in terms of questions we can ask.



## 1. OBSERVATION | WHAT IS THE CONTEXT?

### CONTEXT IS \_\_\_\_\_

By disregarding the "total surroundings" of a Bible verse, we may completely misunderstand the verse.

Here are 2 categories of questions you can ask that will help you make good observations:

#### A. SATURATE

Read the passage and its context \_\_\_\_\_ times, perhaps even in various translations, to get yourself familiar with it.

##### Questions to ask:

- How familiar am I with this passage and the whole book it's in?
- Have I read the whole letter through in one sitting or close together in multiple sittings?
- How familiar am I with the Bible's message as a whole?

#### B. SETTING

The Bible is written in a time and land which is quite \_\_\_\_\_ to many of us, so understanding the setting helps us understand it rightly.

##### Questions to ask:

- Who wrote this?
- Who was it written to?
- When and where was it written?

To answer all these questions, in addition to reading the Bible carefully, sometimes we may have to consult good Bible commentaries to help us fill in the gaps of information about the context.



## 2. INTERPRETATION | WHAT IS THE MEANING?

If we believe what we think the Bible is saying, and not what it is actually saying—it is not the \_\_\_\_\_ we are believing, but rather \_\_\_\_\_.

### MOVE FROM \_\_\_\_\_ TO \_\_\_\_\_

If we miss the big picture - the main point that the author meant to communicate - we've missed the whole thing. Focus on the big picture before you strain at the details.

Here are 3 categories of questions, from big to small, to ask after you have made observations:

### A. PARAGRAPHS (STRUCTURE)

This has to do with major forms such as \_\_\_\_\_ and smaller literary \_\_\_\_\_ such as repetition, parallelism and chiasms.

#### Questions to ask:

- What is the genre of this passage?
- What words and themes are repeated?
- What structure can I see in the text? Are there parallel thoughts/concepts? Is it grouped or arranged a certain way? Why?
- Is this section telling me something descriptive or prescriptive? Is it telling me something about what has been done? Or telling me something to do? (indicative vs. imperative)

### B. SENTENCES (SYNTAX)

Syntax is the study of the \_\_\_\_\_ of words, phrases, and clauses to form \_\_\_\_\_.

#### Questions to ask:

- What does the grammar tell me?
- What is the main verb? Who is the subject? Is anything modifying the verb?
- What are the linking words? (conjunctions and prepositions - e.g. - and, or, but, then, therefore, so that, etc)
- How do the linking words connect the parts of the sentences (clauses)?

### C. WORDS (SEMANTICS)

Semantics is the study of word \_\_\_\_\_. A word's shade of meaning might be unclear, but the immediate \_\_\_\_\_ will usually make that meaning clear.

#### Questions to ask:

- What are the possible range of meanings for this word?
- What meaning makes the most sense in the context of this passage?
- Why does that meaning make most sense over other choices?

**WORDS (continued):** The task of determining the meaning of a word in the Bible is helped with the use of a good commentary or Bible dictionary that explains the meaning of the original word in the original language.



**WORD STUDIES DANGER:** Watch out for those who would try to hang too much on just one word alone without proper warrant from its context - remember the first rule: **CONTEXT IS KING!**



## 3. APPLICATION | HOW DOES IT APPLY TO US?

Love the LORD your God with \_\_\_\_\_ your \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, and \_\_\_\_\_, and love your neighbour as yourself. (Luke 10:27)

**DON'T BE \_\_\_\_\_ BY GOD'S WORD.**

### A. SUMMARIZE

\_\_\_\_\_ all that a passage has said and gathers it up to see how it fits \_\_\_\_\_.

**Questions to ask:**

- What main point(s) has the text made?
- What is the overall thrust—the persuasive logic—in this passage?
- What is the overall tone of the passage? Rebuke? Encouragement?
- Is this passage descriptive or prescriptive? Is it describing something or prescribing something?

When studying a Biblical passage, write your own summary outline of what the main points are to help you organize the thoughts and concepts in your own mind.

### B. SIGNIFICANCE

Remember: "\_\_\_\_\_ is its own best \_\_\_\_\_."

Find out what the passage means in light of all of Scripture.

**Questions to ask:**

- What does this passage teach about ourselves, our relationships with others, and God?
- What does this passage tell me to believe?
- What does this passage tell me to do?
- Based on what it meant in its original context, what principle or truth can we apply to ourselves today?
- What theological concept(s) is taught in this passage? (e.g. justification, sanctification, atonement, God's sovereignty, etc.)




Only after understanding what the passage meant to the original author and recipients, we can then ask, what does it mean for us today - how does God's Word apply to our heart & life?

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## BIBLE STUDY METHOD CHEAT SHEET

The correct flow of Bible Study is from **OBSERVATION** to **INTERPRETATION** to **APPLICATION**.

### STOP & PRAY! PRAYER IS THE STARTING POINT FOR BIBLE STUDY

 <p><b>OBSERVATION</b></p>	<p><b>1. SATURATE</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How familiar am I with this passage and the whole book it's in?</li> <li>• Have I read the whole letter through in one sitting or close together in multiple sittings?</li> <li>• How familiar am I with the Bible's message as a whole?</li> </ul>
	<p><b>2. SETTING</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Who wrote this?</li> <li>• Who was it written to?</li> <li>• When and where was it written?</li> </ul>
 <p><b>INTERPRETATION</b></p>	<p><b>3. STRUCTURE (PARAGRAPHS)</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is the genre of this passage?</li> <li>• What words and themes are repeated?</li> <li>• What structure can I see in the text?</li> <li>• Are there parallel thoughts/concepts? Is it grouped or arranged a certain way? Why?</li> </ul>
	<p><b>4. SYNTAX (SENTENCES)</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What does the grammar tell me?</li> <li>• What is the main verb? Who is the subject?</li> <li>• Is anything modifying the verb?</li> <li>• How do the linking words connect the parts of the sentences (clauses)?</li> </ul>
	<p><b>5. SEMANTICS (WORDS)</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are the possible range of meanings for this word?</li> <li>• What meaning makes the most sense in the context of this passage?</li> <li>• Why does that meaning make most sense?</li> </ul>
 <p><b>APPLICATION</b></p>	<p><b>6. SUMMARIZE</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What main point(s) has the text made?</li> <li>• What is the overall thrust—the persuasive logic—in this passage?</li> <li>• What is the overall tone of the passage?</li> <li>• Is this passage describing or prescribing something?</li> </ul>
	<p><b>7. SIGNIFICANCE</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What does this passage teach about ourselves, our relationships with others, and God?</li> <li>• What does this passage tell me to believe?</li> <li>• What does this passage tell me to do?</li> <li>• What principle or truth can we apply to today?</li> <li>• What theological concept(s) is taught in this passage?</li> </ul>



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## BIBLE STUDY TOOLS

### READING THE BIBLE

- Knowing Scripture (RC Sproul)
- How to Read the Bible Book by Book
- How to Understand and Apply the OT
- Taking God at His Word (DeYoung)
- Creature of the Word (Matt Chandler)
- How to Understand and Apply the NT

### STUDY BIBLES

Study Bibles are a Bible Translation printed with notes alongside (or in footnotes) with the Scripture that helps give some depth or explanations to understand the text. They usually also include cross-references, maps, timelines, charts and illustrations to help the reader understand the biblical world better.

Here are a few recommended Study Bibles:

- ESV Study Bible
- Reformation Study Bible
- ESV Archaeology Study Bible
- ESV Systematic Theology Study Bible
- ESV Story of Redemption Bible

### COMMENTARIES

Commentaries are an invaluable resource for Bible study. They help to explain the meaning of passages of Scripture and how it fits together with the Bible. They often help with understanding the original languages and, historical and cultural background of the biblical texts.

There are 3 types of commentaries:

#### SINGLE-VOLUME COMMENTARIES

- Believer's Bible Commentary (Nelson)
- The New Bible Commentary (IVP)

#### COMMENTARY SETS

- The Pillar New Testament Commentary
- The Expositor's Bible Commentary
- The New International Commentary (NICOT & NICNT)

#### INDIVIDUAL COMMENTARY SERIES

These are written by individual scholars on a single book of the Bible. They are best for the most in-depth, scholarly material on a particular book. Check out the "Top Commentaries Lists" at [Challies.com](http://Challies.com) or [Ligonier.org](http://Ligonier.org) for great recommendations!

### OTHER TOOLS

Some other useful tools are: Concordances, Bible Dictionaries, Bible Atlases and New Testament/Old Testament Introductions, Bible Book Devotionals.

### BIBLE SOFTWARE

- [LOGOS Bible Software](#)
- [BibleWorks](#)
- [Accordance Bible Software](#)
- [OliveTree Bible Reader](#)

### ONLINE RESOURCES

- [Bible.org](http://Bible.org)
- [BibleHub.com](http://BibleHub.com)
- [The Bible Project](http://The Bible Project)
- [GotQuestions.org](http://GotQuestions.org)
- [Ligonier.org/learn](http://Ligonier.org/learn)
- [DesiringGod.org/labs](http://DesiringGod.org/labs)
- [Crosswalk.com](http://Crosswalk.com)
- [WhiteHorseInn.org](http://WhiteHorseInn.org)