

BIBLE INTERPRETATION COURSE



STUDY FOR MEN'S MINISTRY KUKUM SSEC

Facilitator – Pr. Paul A. Iki

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BIBLE INTERPRETATION (HOW TO STUDY YOUR BIBLE)

Studying the Bible effectively requires a structured approach, whether you're a beginner or looking to deepen your understanding. Here's a step-by-step guide to help you:

1. Choose a Good Bible Translation

- Select a translation that balances accuracy and readability, such as:
 - **Literal Translations** (for deep study): ESV, NASB, KJV
 - **Thought-for-Thought Translations** (for easier reading): NIV, NLT
 - **Paraphrase** (for devotional reading): The Message, TLB

2. Pray Before You Start

- Ask God for wisdom and understanding (James 1:5).
- Approach with a humble heart, open to learning.

3. Use a Study Method

Here are three common methods:

a) The Inductive Method (Observation, Interpretation, Application)

- **Observation:** What does the passage say? (Who, what, where, when, why, how?)
- **Interpretation:** What does it mean? (Context, historical background, language)
- **Application:** How does this apply to my life?

b) The Topical Study

- Choose a theme (e.g., faith, love, grace).
- Use a concordance or Bible app to find all related verses.
- Compare passages for a fuller understanding.

c) The Chapter-by-Chapter Study

- Read a chapter thoroughly.
- Summarize key points and lessons.
- Reflect on the main message.

4. Use Helpful Study Tools

- **Study Bibles** (NIV Study Bible, ESV Study Bible)

- **Bible Commentaries** (Matthew Henry's, MacArthur Study Bible)
- **Bible Apps/Websites** (Blue Letter Bible, Bible Gateway, Logos)

5. Take Notes & Journal

- Write key insights, personal reflections, and questions.
- Keep a prayer journal based on what you learn.

6. Cross-Reference Scriptures

- Compare scripture with other parts of the Bible to see how it connects.
- Use footnotes and concordances for deeper insights.

7. Memorize Key Verses

- Start with foundational verses like John 3:16, Romans 8:28, and Philippians 4:13.
- Repeating and meditating on scripture strengthens faith.

8. Apply What You Learn

- Studying is not just for knowledge—it's for transformation.
- Ask: How does this passage change the way I think, act, or believe?

9. Join a Bible Study Group

- Discussing with others brings new perspectives.
- Accountability helps with consistency.

10. Be Consistent

- Set a specific time and place for Bible study.
- Even 15-30 minutes daily can be powerful.

THE BIBLE USER'S MANUAL

A "User's Manual" Approach to the Bible

If we think of the Bible as a manual for life, here's how you can "use" it effectively:

1. Understanding the Purpose of the Bible

- **God's Revelation** – The Bible reveals who God is and His plan for humanity (2 Timothy 3:16-17).
- **A Guide for Life** – It provides wisdom for living (Psalm 119:105).
- **A Path to Salvation** – It shows the way to eternal life through Jesus Christ (John 3:16, Romans 10:9).

2. How to Navigate the Bible

- **Old Testament (Genesis–Malachi)** – History, law, prophecy, poetry, and wisdom.
- **New Testament (Matthew–Revelation)** – The life of Jesus, the early church, and future prophecy.
- **Key Sections:**
 - **Instruction Manual (Proverbs, Sermon on the Mount, Epistles)** – Wisdom for daily living.
 - **Troubleshooting Guide (Psalms, Job, Lamentations)** – Comfort in difficult times.
 - **Future Preview (Revelation, Daniel, Matthew 24)** – Insights into God's plan for the future.

3. How to "Use" the Bible Daily

- **Read it Regularly** – A chapter or passage each day.
- **Study It Deeply** – Use study guides, commentaries, and cross-references.
- **Pray Through It** – Ask God to reveal meaning and apply it to your life.
- **Live It Out** – Apply biblical principles in your daily actions.

THE COMPLETE BIBLE STUDY TOOL KIT

The Complete Bible Study Tool Kit

If you want to dive deeper into God's Word, having the right tools can make a huge difference. Here's a **complete toolkit** to help you study the Bible effectively.

1. Essential Bible Versions

Different translations serve different purposes:

- **Word-for-Word (Best for Deep Study)** – ESV, NASB, KJV
- **Thought-for-Thought (Easier to Read)** – NIV, NLT
- **Paraphrase (For Devotional Reading)** – The Message, TLB

Recommended Tool: Use a parallel Bible or an app like **YouVersion** to compare translations.

2. Study Bibles

A good study Bible has notes, explanations, and cross-references. Some of the best include:

- **ESV Study Bible** – In-depth explanations & historical context
- **NIV Life Application Bible** – Focuses on how to apply scripture
- **MacArthur Study Bible** – Verse-by-verse commentary

3. Bible Commentaries & Concordances

These tools help explain difficult passages and words.

- **Commentaries (For Understanding Context)**
 - Matthew Henry's Commentary (Classic & detailed)
 - Warren Wiersbe's "Be" Series (Practical & engaging)
 - John MacArthur Bible Commentary (Theological depth)
- **Concordances (Find Specific Words & Topics)**
 - Strong's Exhaustive Concordance (For original Hebrew & Greek meanings)
 - Nave's Topical Bible (Organized by topic)

Recommended Tool: Use **BibleHub** or **Blue Letter Bible** (free online resources).

4. Bible Study Methods

Choose a study approach:

- **Inductive Study (Deep Analysis)** – Observation, Interpretation, Application

- **Chapter-by-Chapter Study** – Read, summarize, and apply key lessons
- **Topical Study** – Focus on themes like prayer, faith, or grace
- **Word Study** – Research meanings using a lexicon

Recommended Tool: Logos Bible Software (powerful for word studies).

5. Bible Apps & Online Tools

- **YouVersion Bible App** (Daily plans & devotionals)
- **BibleHub** (Parallel Bibles, commentaries, interlinear texts)
- **Blue Letter Bible** (Greek/Hebrew study & word searches)
- **Logos Bible Software** (Advanced Bible research)

6. Bible Journals & Note-Taking Tools

Writing reflections helps you remember and apply scripture.

- **Journaling Bibles** (Wide margins for notes)
- **SOAP Method** (Scripture, Observation, Application, Prayer)
- **Verse Mapping** (Break down key verses visually)

Recommended Tool: Use a notebook or apps like **Evernote** or **Notion**.

7. Bible Study Groups & Community

Studying with others brings fresh insights.

- Join a **Bible study group** at church.
- Use **Facebook Groups** or **online forums** for discussion.
- Follow Bible teachers on **YouTube, podcasts, or social media**.

Recommended Tool: The Bible Project (amazing videos explaining biblical themes).

HOW TO READ THE BIBLE FOR ALL ITS WORTH

How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth

If you want to get the most out of the Bible, it's essential to read it **correctly**—understanding its meaning, context, and how to apply it to your life. This approach is based on principles from the book *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth* by Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart, which emphasizes **proper interpretation (exegesis) and application (hermeneutics)**.

1. Read with the Right Mindset

The Bible is God's Word, but it must be read in context.

- **Not Just Devotionally** – While personal inspiration is good, the Bible is also a historical and literary text.
- **Not Just Literally** – Some parts are poetry, prophecy, or parables and must be read accordingly.
- **Not Just for Knowledge** – The goal is transformation, not just information (James 1:22).

Tip: Pray before reading, asking for wisdom (James 1:5).

2. Understand the Different Genres in the Bible

The Bible is not a single book but a collection of books with different literary styles. Each genre must be read differently:

Genre	Examples	How to Read
Narrative	Genesis, Acts	Look for key themes, God's character, and life lessons.
Law	Exodus, Leviticus	Understand cultural context; not all laws apply today.
Wisdom	Proverbs, Ecclesiastes	Read as general principles, not absolute promises.
Poetry	Psalms, Song of Solomon	Pay attention to imagery and emotions.
Prophecy	Isaiah, Revelation	Discern between fulfilled and future prophecy.
Gospels	Matthew, John	Study Jesus' teachings in context.
Epistles	Romans, Ephesians	Learn church teachings and how to live as a Christian.

Tip: Use a **study Bible** to help understand historical background.

3. Interpret the Bible Correctly (Exegesis vs. Eisegesis)

- **Exegesis** (✓) = Drawing the meaning **out of** the text based on context.
- **Eisegesis** (✗) = Reading **into** the text with personal bias.

Steps for Proper Interpretation:

1. **Understand the original meaning** (Who was the author? Who was the audience?).
2. **Consider historical and cultural context** (Why was it written? What was happening at that time?).
3. **Look at the literary context** (Read the whole chapter, not just one verse).
4. **Compare Scripture with Scripture** (The Bible interprets itself).

Tip: Use tools like **BibleHub.com** or **Blue Letter Bible** for word studies.

4. Apply the Bible to Your Life (Hermeneutics)

Once you understand the meaning, ask: **How does this apply today?**

- **Timeless Truth vs. Cultural Context** – Some commands (like loving others) apply universally; others (like head coverings in 1 Corinthians 11) were cultural.
- **Make it Practical** – How can this verse change your thinking or actions?
- **Live it Out** – The Bible is meant to transform, not just inform (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

Tip: Use the **SOAP method** – Scripture, Observation, Application, Prayer.

5. Use Helpful Study Tools

Top Bible Study Resources:

- **Study Bibles** – ESV Study Bible, NIV Life Application Bible
- **Bible Apps** – YouVersion, Logos Bible Software
- **Commentaries** – Matthew Henry's, Warren Wiersbe's "Be" Series
- **Online Resources** – The Bible Project, Bible Gateway, Blue Letter Bible

Final Thoughts

Reading the Bible for all its worth means reading it with **understanding, wisdom, and a heart ready to obey**. By applying these principles, you'll **gain deeper insight** and **grow spiritually** in your walk with God.

UNDERSTANDING AND APPLYING THE BIBLE

Understanding and Applying the Bible

Reading the Bible is one thing, but truly **understanding and applying** it takes intentional effort. Here's a guide to help you go beyond just reading and actually living out God's Word.

1. Understanding the Bible (Exegesis)

Before applying Scripture, we need to correctly interpret it. This involves **exegesis**—drawing out the original meaning rather than reading our own ideas into it (**eisegesis**).

A. Read in Context

Every verse is part of a **larger passage**, so ask:

- **Who wrote it?** (Moses, Paul, John, etc.)
- **Who was it written to?** (Israelites, early church, specific individuals?)
- **What is the historical and cultural background?**
- **What type of writing is it?** (Poetry, law, prophecy, epistle, etc.)

Example: Philippians 4:13 ("I can do all things through Christ") isn't about winning a football game—it's about enduring hardship with God's strength.

B. Let Scripture Interpret Scripture

- Compare verses to get a **full picture** (e.g., grace in Romans 6 vs. faith in James 2).
- Use **cross-references** to see how different books connect.

Example: Compare **Genesis 3:15** (the first prophecy of Jesus) with **Matthew 1:23** (Jesus' birth fulfilling prophecy).

C. Use Study Tools

- **Study Bibles** (ESV Study Bible, NIV Life Application Bible)
- **Commentaries** (Matthew Henry, Warren Wiersbe)
- **Bible Apps/Websites** (Blue Letter Bible, Bible Gateway)
- **Concordances** (Strong's Concordance for original Greek/Hebrew meanings)

2. Applying the Bible (Hermeneutics)

Once we understand the meaning, we must ask: **How does this apply today?**

A. Determine What's Universal vs. Cultural

- **Universal Truths:** Love your neighbor, trust God, avoid sin (apply always).
- **Cultural Contexts:** Head coverings (1 Corinthians 11), dietary laws (Leviticus 11).

Example: The command to "greet one another with a holy kiss" (Romans 16:16) was a cultural practice. Today, the equivalent might be a handshake or hug.

B. Use the S.O.A.P. Bible Study Method

S – Scripture: Write down the verse or passage.

O – Observation: What does the text say? Who is speaking?

A – Application: How does this change my thoughts, actions, or beliefs?

P – Prayer: Ask God to help you apply His Word.

Example: **James 1:22** says, "Be doers of the word, and not hearers only." Application: I need to act on what I learn from Scripture.

C. Live It Out

- **Obey God's Commands** – If the Bible says to forgive, forgive.
- **Change Your Thinking** – Replace lies with God's truth (Romans 12:2).
- **Apply It in Daily Life** – What does this passage mean for your family, work, and relationships?

3. Practical Steps for Bible Application

- ✓ **Choose a Study Plan** – Read through a book or follow a topical plan.
- ✓ **Journal Your Insights** – Write what God is teaching you.
- ✓ **Memorize Scripture** – Hide God's Word in your heart (Psalm 119:11).
- ✓ **Discuss with Others** – Join a Bible study group for accountability.
- ✓ **Pray Over What You Learn** – Ask God to help you live it out.

Final Thought

The Bible **transforms** lives when we don't just read it but actually **apply it**. Jesus said in **Matthew 7:24-27** that the wise person builds their life on His teachings **by obeying them**.

HOW TO UNDERSTAND YOUR BIBLE

How to Understand Your Bible

Understanding the Bible goes beyond just reading it—it requires careful interpretation, context awareness, and application. Here's a step-by-step guide to help you grasp Scripture deeply and accurately.

1. Approach the Bible with the Right Mindset

Pray for Wisdom – Ask God for understanding (James 1:5).

Read with Humility – Be open to learning and correction.

Have a Desire to Apply It – The Bible is meant to **transform** you (James 1:22).

2. Read in Context

One of the biggest mistakes is pulling verses out of context. Follow these guidelines:

Consider the Surrounding Verses

- Read at least a few **verses before and after** to understand the flow of thought.

Know the Historical and Cultural Background

- Who was the original audience?
- What was happening at that time?
- What customs, laws, or traditions influenced the writing?

Example: Jeremiah 29:11 ("I know the plans I have for you") was written to exiled Israelites—not a personal promise for success. However, it **reveals God's character**, which applies to all believers.

3. Use Scripture to Interpret Scripture

The Bible is **its best interpreter**. If a verse is unclear, look for related passages:

Use **cross-references** (found in study Bibles or apps).

Compare different translations for clarity.

Consider **the whole Bible's message**, not just one verse.

Example: Ephesians 2:8-9 says we are saved by grace, not works, but **James 2:26** says faith without works is dead. Studying both shows that true faith **results in good works**, not that works save us.

4. Use Helpful Study Tools

Study Bibles – ESV Study Bible, NIV Life Application Bible
Commentaries – Matthew Henry's, Warren Wiersbe's "Be" Series
Bible Apps/Websites – Blue Letter Bible, Bible Gateway, Logos Bible Software
Concordances – Strong's Concordance (to study Hebrew/Greek words)

5. Apply What You Learn

Understanding Scripture isn't just about knowledge—it should change how you live. Ask:

- ✓ **What does this passage reveal about God?**
- ✓ **How does it shape my beliefs, actions, and character?**
- ✓ **Is there a command to obey, a promise to trust, or a warning to heed?**

Practical Application: If studying **Philippians 4:6-7** (about not worrying), apply it by praying whenever you feel anxious.

Final Thought

Understanding the Bible takes patience, study, and reliance on the Holy Spirit. The more you read with **context, interpretation, and application in mind**, the clearer and more meaningful it becomes.

PART 1: BASIC ISSUES IN INTERPRETATION

Basic Issues in Bible Interpretation

Interpreting the Bible correctly is essential for understanding its true meaning and applying it properly. Misinterpretation can lead to confusion, false doctrines, and even manipulation. Here are some key **issues** to be aware of when studying Scripture.

1. The Importance of Context

One of the biggest mistakes in Bible interpretation is **taking verses out of context**.

Immediate Context – What do the surrounding verses say?

Historical Context – What was happening in that time period?

Cultural Context – What customs and traditions influenced the message?

Biblical Context – How does this passage fit into the entire Bible?

Example of Misinterpretation:

Philippians 4:13 ("I can do all things through Christ") – This is often used for personal success, but in context, Paul was talking about **contentment in all circumstances**.

2. Literal vs. Figurative Language

Not every passage should be taken literally. The Bible contains **metaphors, parables, poetry, and symbolism**.

Literal Passages – Historical events, commands, doctrine

Figurative Passages – Parables, visions, poetic language

Example:

John 6:53 ("Eat my flesh and drink my blood") – Jesus wasn't talking about cannibalism but symbolizing faith in His sacrifice.

3. Different Literary Genres Require Different Approaches

Example:

Proverbs 22:6 ("Train up a child... and he will not depart from it") – This is a **wisdom principle**, not a guaranteed promise.

4. Exegesis vs. Eisegesis

Exegesis (✓ Right Approach) – Drawing out the original meaning based on context.

Eisegesis (✗ Wrong Approach) – Reading personal opinions into the text.

Example of Eisegesis:

Jeremiah 29:11 ("I have plans to prosper you") – This was a specific promise to **Israel in exile**, not a universal promise of financial success.

5. The Role of Culture and Time Periods

The Bible was written in different **historical and cultural settings**. Some commands were specific to a time and place, while others are universal.

Examples of Cultural Commands:

- Head coverings (1 Corinthians 11)
- Greeting with a holy kiss (Romans 16:16)

Examples of Universal Commands:

- Love your neighbor (Matthew 22:39)
- Avoid sexual immorality (1 Corinthians 6:18)

6. The Original Languages Matter

The Bible was written in **Hebrew (Old Testament), Aramaic (parts of Daniel), and Greek (New Testament)**. Some meanings get lost in translation.

Example:
"Love" in Greek:

- **Agape** – Selfless, unconditional love (God's love)
- **Phileo** – Brotherly love (friendship)
- **Eros** – Romantic love

Understanding these differences helps clarify meaning.

7. The Danger of Personal Bias

Everyone brings **preconceived ideas** to the Bible. Be careful not to make Scripture say what you **want** it to say.

Solution:

- **Let Scripture interpret Scripture** (compare related passages).
- **Check multiple translations** for clarity.
- **Use study tools** like commentaries and lexicons.

Final Thoughts

Interpreting the Bible correctly requires **context, literary awareness, historical understanding, and humility**. The goal is not just **information**, but **transformation**—living according to God's truth.

WHO WAS THE BIBLE WRITTEN FOR?

Who Was the Bible Written For?

The Bible was written for **all people**, but it was originally addressed to **specific audiences** in different historical and cultural settings. To properly understand and apply Scripture, it's important to recognize both the **original audience** and its **universal relevance**.

1. The Bible's Original Audience

While the Bible is God's message to all humanity, each book was written to a specific group of people at a particular time.

A. Old Testament (Before Jesus)

- **The Israelites (God's Chosen People)** – Most of the Old Testament was written for them.
- **Surrounding Nations** – Some prophecies were directed at non-Israelite nations (e.g., Assyria, Babylon).
- **Future Generations** – Many prophecies and promises looked forward to the Messiah (Jesus) and a future kingdom.

Example:

- **The Law (Exodus, Leviticus, Deuteronomy)** was given specifically to Israel, but many principles (e.g., loving God, justice, morality) apply to all people.

B. New Testament (After Jesus)

- **The Early Church** – The Gospels and Epistles were written for early Christians across the Roman Empire.
- **Jews & Gentiles** – The message of salvation was for both Jews and non-Jews (Acts 15:7-9).
- **All Future Believers** – Jesus' teachings and the apostles' writings were meant for future generations of Christians.

Example:

- **The letters of Paul (Romans, Corinthians, Ephesians, etc.)** were written to specific churches but contain universal principles for Christian living today.

2. Is the Bible for Everyone?

Yes! While each part of the Bible had an original audience, God's Word is intended for **all people, in all times, and all places**.

A. Universal Messages in the Bible

- ✓ **Salvation is for all people** (John 3:16, Romans 10:13).
- ✓ **God's moral standards apply to everyone** (Romans 2:14-15).
- ✓ **God's promises are available to believers** (2 Corinthians 1:20).

B. Understanding the Cultural Context

Some passages were meant for a specific culture or time period but contain principles we can still learn from today.

Example:

- **1 Corinthians 11:6 ("Women should cover their heads")** – This was a cultural custom in Corinth but reflects a deeper principle of respect and order in worship.

3. How Can We Apply the Bible Today?

To apply Scripture correctly, we must:

- ✓ **Recognize the original audience** – Who was it written to?
- ✓ **Identify timeless truths** – What applies universally?
- ✓ **Apply it to modern life** – How does this shape my faith and actions?

Example:

- **The Ten Commandments (Exodus 20)** were given to Israel but reflect God's moral law, which is still relevant today.

Final Thought

The Bible was originally written to **specific people** in history, but its **message is for all of humanity**. It reveals **God's character, His plan of salvation, and how we should live**.

WHAT IS INTERPRETATION

What is Interpretation?

Interpretation is the process of **understanding and explaining** the meaning of something. When it comes to the **Bible**, interpretation (also called **hermeneutics**) involves studying Scripture to discover what it **originally meant** and how it **applies today**.

1. Why is Interpretation Important?

The Bible was written thousands of years ago, in different languages, cultures, and historical contexts. Without proper interpretation, people may:

- ✗ **Misunderstand the message**
- ✗ **Take verses out of context**
- ✗ **Apply Scripture incorrectly**

Example of Misinterpretation:

Matthew 18:20 ("Where two or three gather, I am there") – Often used to encourage group prayer, but in context, it's about **church discipline**.

2. Key Steps in Biblical Interpretation

A. Read in Context

Look at the surrounding verses – What is happening before and after?

Understand the historical and cultural background – Who was the original audience?

Identify the literary genre – Is it poetry, prophecy, law, or a letter?

Example:

Jeremiah 29:11 ("I know the plans I have for you") – This was written to **exiled Israelites**, not directly about personal success. But it reveals **God's faithfulness**, which applies to all believers.

B. Compare Scripture with Scripture

The Bible is **consistent**, so unclear passages should be interpreted in light of clearer ones.

Use **cross-references** to see how different parts of the Bible connect.

Example:

Ephesians 2:8-9 (Saved by grace, not works) vs. **James 2:26** (Faith without works is dead) – These do not contradict but show that **true faith results in good works**.

C. Recognize Literal vs. Figurative Language

The Bible contains **historical accounts, metaphors, parables, and symbolism**.

Example:

John 6:53 ("Eat my flesh and drink my blood") – Jesus didn't mean literal cannibalism; He was talking about believing in His sacrifice.

D. Apply the Passage Correctly

Ask:

- ✓ **What did this mean to the original audience?**
- ✓ **Is this a universal truth or a cultural practice?**
- ✓ **How does it apply to my life today?**

Example:

The Ten Commandments (Exodus 20) – Given to Israel, but the moral principles (don't steal, don't lie, honor God) still apply today.

3. Exegesis vs. Eisegesis

Exegesis (✓ Correct Approach) – Drawing the meaning **out** of the text based on context.

Eisegesis (✗ Wrong Approach) – Reading **personal opinions** into the text.

Example of Eisegesis:

Taking Philippians 4:13 ("I can do all things through Christ") to mean you can win a sports game, when in context, it's about enduring hardship.

Final Thought

Proper **interpretation** helps us **understand God's Word accurately** and **apply it faithfully**.

The goal is not just **information**, but **transformation**—living according to the truth of Scripture.

THE BIBLE IS A FOREIGN BOOK

The Bible is a Foreign Book

The Bible was written **thousands of years ago** in cultures very different from ours. It comes from ancient **Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek** societies, making it “**foreign**” to modern readers. To understand it correctly, we must bridge the gap between **their world and ours**.

1. Why is the Bible Foreign to Us?

A. Different Languages

- The **Old Testament** was mostly written in **Hebrew**, with some parts in **Aramaic**.
- The **New Testament** was written in **Greek**.
- Many words and phrases don't translate perfectly into English.

Example:

The Greek word “**agape**” means **unconditional love**, but English only has one word for love.

B. Different Cultures and Customs

The Bible was written in ancient **Middle Eastern cultures**, which had customs that seem strange today.

Example:

Ruth 4:7 – Removing a sandal was a way to confirm a business deal.

John 13:4-5 – Jesus washing the disciples' feet was an act of humility, common in their culture but unfamiliar to us.

C. Different Historical and Political Context

The Bible was written in the context of **ancient empires** like Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Greece, and Rome. Without this background, some passages lose their full meaning.

Example:

Luke 2:1 (“**Caesar Augustus issued a decree**”) – Understanding the Roman census helps us see why Mary and Joseph traveled to Bethlehem.

2. How Can We Understand a Foreign Book?

A. Study the Historical Context

Learn about **ancient Israel, Jewish customs, and Roman rule** to grasp what was happening when the Bible was written.

Example:

Jesus being called “**the Lamb of God**” (John 1:29) makes sense when we understand the Jewish **Passover sacrifice**.

B. Recognize Figurative Language

Not every passage is meant to be taken **literally**—some use **poetry, parables, and metaphors**.

Example:

Psalm 23:1 ("The Lord is my shepherd") – God is not literally a shepherd, but He cares for us like one.

C. Use Bible Study Tools

- **Bible Dictionaries** – Explain ancient words and customs.
- **Concordances** – Help find where words appear in Scripture.
- **Commentaries** – Provide historical and cultural insights.

Helpful Resources:

- **Blue Letter Bible** (online study tool)
- **Strong’s Concordance** (Greek & Hebrew word meanings)
- **ESV Study Bible** (historical background)

Final Thought

The Bible **may be foreign**, but it is still **God’s Word for all people**. With proper **study, context, and interpretation**, we can understand and apply its timeless truths today.

LOOK FOR THE PLAIN MEANING

Look for the Plain Meaning of the Bible

When studying the Bible, one of the key principles is to look for the **plain meaning** of the text. The Bible often communicates its message in clear, straightforward ways, and **starting with the obvious meaning** is essential for proper interpretation. Here's how to approach finding the plain meaning of Scripture:

1. What Does "Plain Meaning" Mean?

The **plain meaning** refers to the **natural, straightforward interpretation** of the text. It's the meaning that comes from reading the words as they are, without complex metaphors or hidden meanings unless the text clearly indicates otherwise.

A. Literal Meaning

- When the Bible speaks clearly about an event or teaching, take it **literally** unless there are clear indications that it's symbolic.
- Example: **John 11:43-44** – When Jesus says, "Lazarus, come out," the plain meaning is that Lazarus was physically raised from the dead.

B. Understand the Original Context

- **Context** is critical in understanding the plain meaning of a passage. Even if a verse seems simple, consider the **surrounding verses**, the **historical context**, and the **cultural background** to avoid misinterpretation.

Example:

Matthew 7:7 ("Ask and it will be given to you") – On the surface, it seems like God will give us anything we ask for. But in context, Jesus is teaching about **prayer** and **seeking God's will** (not selfish requests).

2. Look for Direct, Clear Teachings

The Bible has many parts that teach directly about God, salvation, morality, and living according to His will. The plain meaning is often **the most obvious** and easy to grasp when the passage is meant to teach something straightforward.

A. Moral Teachings

- The **Ten Commandments** (Exodus 20) give clear moral instructions that apply directly to all people.
- The **Sermon on the Mount** (Matthew 5-7) includes straightforward teachings like loving your enemies, turning the other cheek, and being a peacemaker.

3. Avoid Overcomplicating the Text

Sometimes, people try to read too much into a passage or search for hidden meanings that aren't there. While the Bible does use symbols and metaphors, many passages are meant to be understood **simply and directly**.

A. Don't Force Symbolism

If a passage seems clear, don't try to make it **more complicated** than it needs to be.

- **Example: Psalm 23:1 ("The Lord is my shepherd")** – The plain meaning is that God provides for and cares for His people like a shepherd cares for sheep. There's no need to make this more complex.

4. Recognize When Figurative Language is Used

The Bible often uses **metaphors, parables, and symbolism**, especially in poetic or prophetic books. However, these instances are usually indicated by context or the **nature of the genre** (e.g., parables in the Gospels or visions in Revelation). When the Bible uses figurative language, we should look for the **underlying truth** it's trying to convey.

Example:

Revelation 5:5-6 – Jesus is described as a **Lion and a Lamb**, symbolizing both His strength and His sacrificial death. This is **figurative language**, not a literal description of Jesus' appearance.

5. Start with Clear Passages Before Difficult Ones

When studying a difficult or unclear passage, it's helpful to **start with clearer, more straightforward passages** on the same topic. This can guide your interpretation of the more complex ones.

A. Use Scripture to Interpret Scripture

- If you're unsure about a passage, find others that **teach the same principle** and use them as a guide.
- **Example:**
1 John 4:7-8 says, "God is love." If you're studying a passage about God's character, use this clear teaching to help interpret other verses.

Final Thought

The Bible often speaks plainly, and understanding its **plain meaning** is a crucial first step in interpretation. Start with the obvious and **let the text speak for itself**. When the passage seems

complex or symbolic, use context, historical background, and clear passages elsewhere to guide your understanding.

PART 2: STEPS TO UNDERSTAND THE BIBLE

Steps to Understand the Bible

Understanding the Bible can feel overwhelming, but it's absolutely doable with the right approach. Here are practical steps to help you **understand** and **apply** God's Word more effectively:

1. Pray for Understanding

Before diving into the Bible, **pray** and ask God to open your heart and mind. The Bible is spiritually discerned, and prayer prepares you to receive the truth.

Prayer Example:

"Lord, help me understand Your Word today and apply it to my life. Guide me with Your Holy Spirit to know Your truth."

2. Choose a Good Translation

The Bible was originally written in Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek, so choosing a **clear and reliable translation** is important. Some popular translations include:

- **ESV (English Standard Version)** – Known for being accurate and readable.
- **NIV (New International Version)** – Easy to read and widely used.
- **NASB (New American Standard Bible)** – Very literal translation, great for in-depth study.
- **CSB (Christian Standard Bible)** – Balanced between readability and accuracy.

Tip: If you're new to Bible reading, try a **modern translation** like the NIV or ESV.

3. Read in Context

Context is everything! To understand a verse or passage correctly, always consider the **immediate context** (the verses around it), **the broader context** (the chapter, book, and even the whole Bible), and **historical context** (the time and culture in which it was written).

Example:

Matthew 7:7 ("Ask and it will be given to you") – When read in context, it's not a blank check for anything you ask, but a teaching on **prayer** and **God's good will** in responding to His people.

4. Observe the Text

Observation is about carefully reading and noting details. Ask questions like:

- Who is speaking or writing?
- To whom is it being written?
- What is the main message?
- Are there any repeated words or themes?
- Is there anything that seems strange or hard to understand?

Take note of keywords, phrases, and figures of speech.

Example:

In **John 3:16**, note the key words: “For God so loved the world,” “gave,” and “whoever believes.” These words highlight God's love, the gift of Jesus, and the requirement of faith.

5. Interpret the Meaning

After observing the text, **interpret** its meaning. Ask:

- What is the **plain meaning** of this passage?
- What **principles** or **truths** does it teach?
- Is it a **command** to obey, a **promise** to claim, a **warning** to heed, or a **doctrine** to believe?

Be careful not to impose your own ideas onto the text (this is called **eisegesis**). Instead, let the Bible speak for itself, drawing out the meaning **from the text** (this is called **exegesis**).

6. Apply the Scripture

The Bible isn't just for knowing facts; it's meant to **transform your life**. After interpreting the meaning, consider how it applies to you today. Ask yourself:

- How does this passage challenge my thinking, actions, or attitudes?
- What can I do differently today based on this truth?
- Is there a sin to confess, a promise to claim, or a command to follow?

Example:

James 1:22 ("Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says")

– This verse challenges us not to just read the Bible, but to **live it out** in our daily actions.

7. Use Study Tools

Sometimes, deeper study can help clarify difficult passages. Here are a few tools to consider:

- **Bible Dictionaries** – Help define terms, people, and places.
- **Concordances** – Show where words appear in the Bible.

- **Commentaries** – Provide explanations and insights from biblical scholars.
- **Bible Apps** – Many have built-in study features, such as verse cross-references, devotionals, and commentary.

Example Tools:

- **Blue Letter Bible** (online study tool)
- **YouVersion Bible App** (with reading plans)
- **Strong's Concordance** (Greek/Hebrew lexicon)

8. Reflect and Meditate

Spend time reflecting on what you've read. Take a moment to **meditate** on it and let the Holy Spirit speak to you. This may involve **journaling**, **memorizing** Scripture, or simply sitting quietly and letting the truths settle in your heart.

Tip: You could try reflecting on one verse each day, allowing it to shape your mindset.

9. Share and Discuss

Sometimes, discussing what you've read with others can help you understand it better. Join a Bible study group, ask questions, and share insights with others. Sometimes others can see things in the text that you might have missed.

10. Apply Consistently

The key to growing in your understanding of the Bible is **consistent application**. Regular reading and reflection help you become more familiar with God's Word. Over time, you'll understand it more deeply and begin to see its relevance to every area of your life.

Final Thought

Understanding the Bible is a lifelong journey, and while it takes time and effort, it's worth it. By following these steps, you can deepen your understanding and allow God's Word to shape your life.

PART 3: APPLICATION

What is Application in Bible Study?

Application is the process of **putting what you've learned from the Bible into action** in your life. It's about moving beyond simply understanding Scripture to **living it out** in a practical, real-world way. Here's how you can apply the Bible to your everyday life:

1. What Does Application Mean?

Application means **connecting the ancient truths of Scripture** to your **current life circumstances**. It's asking, "How does this verse or passage **relate to me today**?" and then acting on it. The Bible is **alive** and **active**, and it has something to say to every area of life: relationships, work, faith, emotions, and more.

2. Steps for Applying the Bible

A. Understand the Meaning First

Before you can apply the Bible, you need to **understand what it means**. Make sure you've done the work of **reading, observing, and interpreting** the text.

B. Ask Practical Questions

After interpreting the passage, ask yourself some application questions like:

- **What is God saying to me through this passage?**
- **How does this truth change my thoughts, attitudes, or behaviors?**
- **Is there a command I need to obey, a sin I need to confess, or a promise I need to claim?**
- **How does this impact the way I live today in my relationships, work, or faith?**

C. Identify the Key Principle

Many Bible passages contain key **principles** that can be applied to a variety of situations. Try to summarize the **core message** of a passage.

Example:

Philippians 4:6-7 – "Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God."

- **Key principle:** Prayer and thanksgiving are powerful tools for dealing with anxiety.

D. Turn Commands Into Action

The Bible is full of **commands**—whether it's to love, forgive, serve, or trust. These commands are meant to be obeyed, not just studied. Identify any **imperatives** in the passage (commands or instructions), and then find practical ways to **implement** them.

Example:

Matthew 28:19-20 – "Go and make disciples of all nations..."

- **Application:** Consider how you can share the gospel in your own life, whether that's through a conversation, service project, or support for missions.

E. Make It Personal

Application isn't just about general principles—it's about **personal transformation**. Consider how the passage **directly applies to your life** right now. Is there something specific God is calling you to change or do?

Example:

James 1:22 – "Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says."

- **Personal Application:** Ask yourself, "Is there an area of my life where I'm hearing God's Word but not acting on it?"

F. Create a Plan for Action

Once you've identified how the Bible applies to your life, it's important to make a **specific action plan**. It could be as simple as a daily habit (e.g., prayer, reading the Bible), or a change in attitude or behavior (e.g., forgiving someone, serving others).

Example:

Matthew 6:33 – "But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness..."

- **Plan:** Spend time each day focusing on God's kingdom, perhaps through prayer, worship, or prioritizing things that reflect His righteousness in your life.

G. Reflect and Review

Application isn't a one-time event—it's a **process**. Regularly review how you're applying Scripture in your life, and check in with yourself or a mentor to see how you're growing.

Tip: Journaling can be a helpful way to reflect on **what God is teaching you** and how you are applying His Word.

3. Common Types of Application

A. Obedience to Commands

The Bible is filled with **commands** that are meant for us to obey.

- **Example: Ephesians 4:32** – "Be kind and compassionate to one another."
 - Application: Practice kindness by reaching out to someone in need today.

B. Embracing Promises

The Bible is also filled with promises that can give us hope and assurance.

- **Example: Romans 8:28** – "We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him..."
 - Application: When facing a tough situation, trust that God will work things out for your good.

C. Repenting of Sin

The Bible calls us to repent (turn away) from sin and turn toward God.

- **Example: 1 John 1:9** – "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins."
 - Application: Identify areas of sin in your life, confess them to God, and accept His forgiveness.

D. Encouragement for Trials

Sometimes the Bible speaks directly into our struggles or challenges, offering encouragement.

- **Example: Romans 5:3-4** – "We rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance..."
 - Application: When facing difficulties, remember that God is using them to build perseverance and character.

4. Benefits of Application

- **Spiritual Growth:** Application helps you grow deeper in your faith.
- **Transformation:** It leads to real change in your attitudes, thoughts, and behaviors.
- **Obedience:** It's a way of demonstrating obedience to God.
- **Blessing:** When we apply God's Word, we experience His blessing and peace in our lives.

Final Thought

The Bible isn't just for information, it's for **transformation**. Applying what you read is the key to living out your faith and growing in your relationship with God. The more we apply Scripture to our lives, the more we reflect God's heart and His Kingdom on Earth.

PART 4: A METHOD OF BIBLICAL EXEGESIS

A Method of Biblical Exegesis

Biblical **exegesis** is the process of interpreting and explaining the meaning of Scripture. The goal of exegesis is to understand **what the text originally meant** to its original audience, and how that meaning can be applied to our lives today. Here's a practical method for doing **biblical exegesis**:

1. Prayer for Insight

Before beginning your study, **pray** and ask God to guide you in understanding His Word. Exegesis is not just an intellectual exercise; it's a spiritual one. Ask God to open your eyes to the truth of His Word.

Prayer Example:

"Lord, as I study Your Word, please help me understand the true meaning of this passage. Open my heart to Your truth, and help me apply it to my life."

2. Read the Text Carefully

Read the passage **multiple times** in a good, reliable translation of the Bible. Read it **slowly**, paying attention to every word. Try reading it in different versions (e.g., ESV, NIV, NASB) to get a sense of its meaning in various translations.

3. Contextual Study

A. Immediate Context

- **What comes before and after the passage?**
- The immediate context is crucial because it can clarify the meaning of individual verses and ensure you don't take them out of context. Look at the surrounding verses to understand the flow of the argument or narrative.

B. Book/Author Context

- Who is the **author** of the book, and **who is the audience**?
- Understand the **historical background**, **cultural setting**, and **purpose** of the book. For example, the letters of Paul were written to specific churches or individuals with particular concerns in mind.

C. Biblical Context (Whole Bible)

- **How does this passage fit into the larger biblical story?**

- The Bible is one unified story, so make sure to understand how the passage fits into God's overall plan of salvation and redemption. Use Scripture to interpret Scripture.

4. Word Study

A. Identify Key Words

- Look for **important or repeated words** in the passage. These may help clarify the meaning of the text. For example, a word that is central to the passage, such as “grace,” “faith,” or “righteousness,” can be studied in-depth.

B. Examine the Original Languages (Greek, Hebrew, Aramaic)

- In many cases, studying the original language of a passage can give deeper insight. This is particularly helpful for understanding key words in the Old Testament (Hebrew) and the New Testament (Greek).
- Use tools like **Strong's Concordance, lexicons, or Bible software** to look up definitions and usages of these words.

Example:

In **John 3:16**, the Greek word for “love” is **agape**, which refers to a selfless, sacrificial love, which is different from other Greek words for love (e.g., **phileo** for brotherly love).

5. Analyze the Literary Genre

The Bible contains various genres: **narrative, poetry, prophecy, epistles, wisdom literature**, etc. Understanding the **genre** helps interpret the passage correctly.

- **Narrative** (e.g., historical books, Gospels): Often meant to tell a story with characters, plot, and action.
- **Poetry** (e.g., Psalms, Song of Solomon): Often uses symbolism, imagery, and parallelism.
- **Epistles** (e.g., Paul's letters): Aimed at specific people or churches, often containing teachings and practical instructions.
- **Prophecy** (e.g., Isaiah, Revelation): Often symbolic, speaking about future events, but also applicable to the present.

6. Identify the Theological Message

Every passage of the Bible has a **theological** message, even if it's not immediately obvious. Ask these questions:

- What is this passage teaching about God?
- What does it reveal about the nature of humanity?

- **What does it say about salvation or how we are to live?**

7. Cross-Referencing

Compare the passage you're studying with other Scriptures that address similar themes or topics. Use a **concordance** or **Bible cross-references** (which are often found in study Bibles) to find related passages. This helps you see the **full counsel of Scripture** on a topic.

Example:

If you're studying **Romans 8:28** ("All things work together for good"), you might compare it with passages like **Genesis 50:20** (Joseph's story) or **2 Corinthians 4:17** (Paul's view on suffering).

8. Interpret the Meaning

Once you've gathered all this information, you can begin to interpret the meaning of the passage. Ask these key questions:

- **What did this passage mean to the original audience?**
Consider historical and cultural details to understand the message in its original context.
- **What timeless principle or truth is found in this passage?**
Even if the original context was different, what universal truth is being communicated?
- **What application can be made today?**
Consider how the message applies to our current lives, both individually and as the church.

9. Application

After understanding the passage, the next step is to **apply** it to your life. The Bible is not just for knowledge, but for transformation. Reflect on:

- **How does this passage challenge me?**
- **What sin do I need to confess?**
- **What promise do I need to claim?**
- **How can I live this out in my relationships, work, or personal walk with God?**

Example:

In **Matthew 5:44** ("Love your enemies"), you might apply it by praying for those who have wronged you and finding ways to show kindness or reconciliation.

10. Seek Further Insights from Commentaries and Scholars

If you're still unsure about certain aspects of the passage, seek help from **biblical commentaries**. Scholars provide deeper insights into the historical, cultural, and theological aspects of a passage.

Conclusion

Biblical exegesis is a thoughtful and thorough process of interpreting Scripture. By following these steps—prayer, reading, context, word study, genre analysis, and application—you'll be able to understand what the Bible truly says and how to apply its timeless truths to your life.

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