

# HOW TO GET OUT OF THE BIBLE WHAT GOD PUT INTO THE BIBLE

## TWO GOALS FOR THIS MORNING

### (1) TO ENCOURAGE YOU TO READ THE BIBLE DAILY

God has spoken to us to reveal his heart, his mind and his plan.  
That should be sufficient motivation to read the Scriptures.

**Isaiah 55.8-9:** "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the Lord. "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts."

God has revealed truth to us about himself and about how we are to live.

And it is often different from the wisdom we're given through other sources.  
So we need to seek after that wisdom passionately and regularly.

**Psalms 119: 105:** Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path.

#### **Common Mistake 1: Giving in to "all or nothing thinking."**

Don't become discouraged if you miss a few days reading the Bible.

Don't set your goal too high.

Decide that you'll read the Bible some part of each day.

But if you're starting out, remember: something is more than nothing.  
Adopt a program that gets you doing something regularly.

#### **Common Mistake 2: Not being practical.**

1. Read at the same time each day.
2. Pick a time and a place where you will be undisturbed.
3. Pick a time when you are alert – and pick a place other than your bed.

### (2) TO HELP YOU "GET SOMETHING OUT OF IT" WHEN YOU READ THE BIBLE

We don't just want to get something out of reading the Bible, we want to get out of it what God put into it.

It's possible to read the Bible and "get something out of it" that wasn't in it to begin with.  
The goal is to get out of a passage its true meaning, not to read our ideas, prejudices and situations into a passage.

## Rules for Interpreting the Bible

## **1. LET THE PARTS THAT ARE CLEAR INTERPRET THE PARTS THAT ARE UNCLEAR.**

The big truths of Scripture are very clear and easily discernible.  
And many other smaller truths are also very apparent.

But there will be times when you don't understand how what you think one passage is saying can be reconciled to what another passage clearly says.  
Let what is clear interpret what's not as clear.

For what you don't understand consult your Bible dictionary or your Study Bible notes, or ask someone about it.

If nothing else, just put the unclear passage "on the shelf," and the more you read in other places, the more likely you'll be finally to understand what the difficult, unclear passage is saying.

### **Common Mistake 3: Starting at the beginning of the Bible and reading through to the end.**

The Old Testament gets real hard real quick.  
Begin in the New Testament where we have the fullness of God's revelation, and use what you learn there to understand what is more difficult and less clear in the Old Testament.

## **2. USE THE DIDACTIC PARTS OF SCRIPTURE TO INTERPRET THE HISTORICAL NARRATIVES, NOT VICE VERSA.**

"Didactic" means designed or intended to teach.

The primary function of the historical narratives in the Old Testament is to convey historical \_\_\_\_\_.

Not every passage in Genesis, Exodus, Numbers, 1 and 2 Kings, etc., is meant to tell us how to live.

In fact, the historical narratives often tell us about people in the life of Israel who made terrible mistakes.

And the Bible never tells us explicitly that what they did was very bad.

**Judges 11.29-35:** Then the Spirit of the Lord came upon Jephthah. ...<sup>30</sup> And Jephthah made a vow to the Lord: "If you give the Ammonites into my hands,<sup>31</sup> whatever comes out of the door of my house to meet me when I return ... I will sacrifice it as a burnt offering." Then Jephthah went over to fight the Ammonites, and the Lord gave them into his hands. ...<sup>34</sup> When Jephthah returned to his home ... who should come out to meet him but his daughter ...<sup>35</sup> When he saw her, he ... cried, "Oh! My daughter! You have made me miserable and wretched, because I have made a vow to the Lord that I cannot break."

Why doesn't it say that Jephthah did wrong and that God was displeased?  
Because that's not what historical narratives do.

### **Gideon in Judges 6**

"Putting a fleece before God" was not an example of how to discern God's will that we

should follow.

It is an example of Gideon's lack of faith, fear, and disobedience that he (and we) needed to overcome.

Historical narratives in the Bible are like spiritual newspapers or news reports: they report the facts

and let the readers draw their own conclusions.

And the best conclusions are drawn when we know how the primary teaching portions of Scripture instruct us to live.

### **3. Before you try to determine what a passage means to you, determine what it meant to the author who wrote it.**

Often people will read a passage and then say, "What this means to me is xyz."

It doesn't matter what a passage means to you.

You didn't write it – Paul did or James did or one of the other Bible authors.

The goal is not to figure out what it means to you, but what it meant to the author.

### **Common Mistake 4: Asking "What does it mean to me?" before we ask and answer "What did it mean to the author who wrote it?"**

A text means what the original author (inspired by God) intended it to mean for the audience for which he wrote it.

**Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart:** God's Word to us was first of all His Word to them.

If they were going to hear it, it could only have come through events and in language they could have understood. Our problem is that we are so far removed from them in time, and sometimes in thought. ... If God's word is to speak to us, we first need to know what it said to its original hearers – and why.

Thus the task of interpreting involves the student/reader at two levels. First, one has to hear the Word they (the original hearers heard; he or she must try to understand what was said to them back then and there. Second, one must learn to hear that same Word in the here and now.

### **4. TO UNDERSTAND A PASSAGE WE MUST READ IT IN CONTEXT.**

**(MOST) Common Mistake 5: Reading a passage without regard to its context.**

#### **A. Historical Context**

What we mean by that is: the occasion and the purpose of each biblical book and/or of its various parts. Here one wants to have an idea of what was going on in Israel or the Church that called forth such a document or what the situation of the author was that caused him to write.

### **Examples from The Epistles**

**Fee and Stuart:** There is one thing that all of the Epistles have in common, and this is the crucial thing to note in reading and interpreting them; they are all what are technically called occasional documents (i.e., arising out of and intended for a specific occasion) ... This means they were occasioned, or called forth, by some special circumstance, either from the reader's side or the author's. Almost all of the new Testament letters were occasioned from the reader's side (Philemon, James, and perhaps Romans are exceptions.) Usually the occasion was some kind of behavior that needed correcting, or a doctrinal error that needed setting right, or a misunderstanding that needed further light.

The answer to this question of what occasioned each letter – or simply put why was it written – is usually to be found within the book itself.

### **Galatians**

**Galatians 1.6-7:** I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel – <sup>7</sup>which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ.

**Galatians 3.1-2:** You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? Before your very eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified. <sup>2</sup>I would like to learn just one thing from you: Did you receive the Spirit by observing the law, or by believing what you heard?

#### **What's the occasion of Galatians?**

Someone is telling the Galatians that faith in Christ is not enough. They're being told that they must also follow the Old Testament law.

### **I Corinthians**

**I Corinthians 1.10-12:** I appeal to you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought. <sup>11</sup>My brothers, some from Chloe's household have informed me that there are quarrels among you. <sup>12</sup>What I mean is this: One of you says, "I follow Paul"; another, "I follow Apollos"; another, "I follow Cephas"; still another, "I follow Christ."

**I Corinthians 5.1-2:** It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that does not occur even among pagans ... And you are proud!

**I Corinthians 7.1:** Now for the matters you wrote about ...

#### **Why is Paul writing?**

1. Some from Chloe's household have come to him and reported that there are divisions in the church.
2. He's heard news of gross sexual sin being tolerated in the church.
3. He has received a letter from the Corinthians asking about various matters.

All of the books of the Bible were written for a particular reason at a particular time with a particular audience in mind.

Understanding these factors (what we call the historical context) will help you understand their message and get out of them what God put into them.

## **B. Literary Context**

Words only have meaning in sentences, and for the most part biblical sentences only have meaning in relation to preceding and succeeding sentences.

The Bible is not a series of disjointed, random thoughts about God.

What we have in the Scriptures are coherent, logical stories and theological arguments.

That means that words take on their meaning from the sentences they're in.

And sentences take on their meaning from the sentences around them.

## **C. Genre Context**

### **1. Historical Narratives**

Narratives record what happened – not necessarily what should have happened or what should happen every time.

That means that not every narrative has an identifiable moral of the story.

Narratives are selective and incomplete.

It is usually a mistake to speculate beyond what we're told.

### **2. The Psalms**

The psalms are a collection of poems and hymns.

They are not propositions or imperatives or stories that illustrate doctrines.

That means they do not function primarily for the teaching of doctrine or moral behavior.

The Psalms are best used to help us express ourselves to God – our joys and sorrows, successes and failures, hopes and regrets.

We find in the Psalms permission and a pattern for being honest with God concerning all that we face and feel.

Most important to remember, the Psalms are musical poems – full of imagery.

Poetry speaks to the depth of our souls in a way that prose and propositions do not.

But it's always dangerous to take imagery and turn it into doctrine.

### **3. Proverbs**

Proverbs, even spiritual proverbs, even God-inspired proverbs are proverbs.

A proverb is a memorable statement of a general truth.

The briefer the statement, the less it will be totally precise and universally applicable.

Proverbs are general truths about how to live a wise life; they are not meant to give us detailed instructions about every life situation.

In the book of Proverbs we find good, practical advice for living life wisely.

But the proverbs in the Bible are not guarantees or promises from God that if you do X, you can be sure that Y will happen.

### **4. The Epistles**

See Rule 4, Historical Context.

## 5. The Gospels

With the Gospels it's important to know that they are not biographies and they are not chronicles of the life of Jesus.

That means they don't try to tell us everything about the life of Jesus.

And it means they don't intend to tell us everything in the exact order it happened.

The Gospel authors are like editors – they decide what to put in and to leave out.

The Gospel authors are like preachers – they decide how to put stories together to make a point, not to give the story to us in exact chronological order.

The Gospel authors are like evangelists – they decide how to tell the story of Jesus so that people will come to believe in him.

**John 20.30-31:** Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. <sup>31</sup>But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

**Mark:** for a Roman audience that admired power, authority and action.

Less teaching and more emphasis on miracles and confrontations that describe the authority and power of Jesus.

**Matthew:** for a Jewish audience, so it contains many quotations and fulfilled prophecies to present Jesus as the long expected Jewish Messiah.

**Luke:** for a Greek audience, so Luke takes pains to show that this Jewish Messiah was a Savior for all people.

**John:** written last, it is the most intent on making the deity of Christ plain and correcting false ideas about who Jesus is.

## APPLICATION

The purpose of reading the Bible is not simply to learn truth about God but to live lives that please God.

That means that in addition to reading the Bible we must apply what we've read.

**James 1.22-25:** Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. <sup>23</sup>Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror <sup>24</sup>and, after looking at himself, goes away and ... forgets what he looks like. <sup>25</sup>But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it—he will be blessed in what he does.

### Common Mistake 6: Reading without a pen or pencil.

If you don't want to write in your Bible, you need a piece of paper or better a notebook.

## Questions to Ask of a Passage for Purposes of Application

Is there a

- P** romise to claim?

- R** eason to praise or thank God?
- A** ttitude to change?
- C** ommand to obey?
- T** ruth to believe?
- I** ntercession to make in prayer or in action?
- C** onfession to make?
- E** xample to follow?

### **Four Marks of a Good Application Plan**

- It's personal.**
- It's practical.**
- It's possible.**
- It's proveable.**

### **Reading Plan**

**Gospel of John**

**Philippians**

**Gospel of Matthew**

**Galatians**

**1 Peter**

**1 John**

**Genesis**

**Exodus**

**Gospel of Luke**

**The Book of Acts**

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