

Living By The Book: Outline

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INTRODUCTION

This is an outline summary of *Living By The Book*, by Howard G and William D Hendricks, Moody Press, 1991. The book's focus is upon the three fundamental skills required for sound Bible Study. The development of these skills does not preclude the required guidance of the Holy Spirit to grant understanding of the spiritual truths presented in Scripture but is complimentary to it.

OBSERVATION: What Do You See?

Key Terms: critical recognition and definitions of key words, phrases, people, places

Structure: A library of carefully constructed books with two structures

Grammatical: subject, object, verb, tense etc.

Literary: Cause/effect relationships; climax/resolution; questions/answers etc.

Literary Form: narrative; short stories (parables); poetry; allegory; satire; etc.

Atmosphere: Settings and feelings communicated from the text

INTERPRETATION: What Does It Mean?

Questions: Bombard the text with questions

Answers: Look for the answers within the texts. More time in observation means less time in interpretation and less time in interpretation means more accurate understanding

Integration: Putting it all together into a meaningful whole. Relate the text to the whole book and bible.

Read: Implement a conscious, concentrated reading strategy

Record: Jot down your insights, observations, questions, and discoveries

Reflect: Take time to reflect and meditate upon what you've just read

APPLICATION: How Does It Work?

For You? What *personal message* is there for *You*?

For Others? What message is there for others in my sphere of influence?

Always Keep The Big Picture In Focus

Observation: What Do I See?

Interpretation: What Does It Mean?

Application: How Does It Work?

Memorize: The 66 Books of the Bible

Learn: How "Scripture References" Work

OBSERVATION

Contemporary culture has made a radical shift in this last century from a word based society of readers ... to an image based society of viewers. This shift has pulverized people's ability to read the bible with understanding because many have lost the art of reading.

There is a direct correlation between your ability to *observe* Scripture and your ability to read.

Approach Reading the Word with a Fresh Perspective

Read different versions of the bible
Read the bible as if you're reading it for the very first time
Read the bible as a *personal love letter* from God to you

Suggested Books to improve your reading:

How to Read a Book, Mortimer J Adler
How to Read Better and Faster, Norman Lewis

LEARN TO READ: 10 Strategies to First-Rate Reading

1. Read Thoughtfully

Assume the role of biblical detective searching for clues about what the text means.
The bible must be read to be understood.
The bible does not yield its fruit to the lazy.

2. Read Repeatedly

Read entire books at one sitting. Most are shorter than a two-three column newspaper article. Learn to appreciate the unity of each book of the bible. Reading each book at one sitting will help you grasp the big picture.

Start at the beginning of the book.

Read the bible in different translations. It keeps God's Word alive and fresh thus avoiding contempt through familiarity.

Listen to tapes of Scripture. The benefits are many:

1. You change the sensory experience from visual to the audible

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2. The voice of the reader with their various points of emphasis may be like reading a new translation and further aid in bring the text alive
3. Repetition: You can play the tapes over and over again.

Read the bible out loud. This will help you to memorize the verses and also have your family members hear the text

Set up a schedule for bible reading. There are many programs out that will assist you in reading through the bible in a year. You can make up your own reading schedule. Whatever you do make sure you see it through.

3. Read Patiently

Bible reading is for the long haul. The fruit of the Word takes time to ripen and people tend to “bail out” just before the richness of the harvest. They approach the Word like a “sprint” rather than a marathon.

Work with one book for one month. That is usually enough time to take ownership of a book in the bible. You can read it through several times, take notes, observe, interpret and apply and even read some other commentaries on the book. After a year, you could have 12 books under your belt and in about 5 ½ years ... the entire bible!

Good Starter Books: Nehemiah, Jonah, Gospel of Mark, followed by 1 Corinthians, Philippians, James or 1 Peter.

Zoom In and Zoom Out. Start with a “wide angle” lens to get the big picture by reading the book in its entirety. Look for a flow and progression of ideas or events. Then zoom in on something that seems prominent. If using the one month approach, spend about a week on the prominent event or idea. Then zoom back out to see how it fits into the big picture. Continue to do this throughout your studies.

Alter your approach. There are many strategies you can use to study scripture. Be consistent and persistent in study but don't be afraid to vary your approach.

Be patient with yourself and be patient with the text. If you run a marathon like you're running a sprint you'll probably never see the finish line ... you'll only hear the exhilaration of those who have.

4. Read Selectively

The 5 W's plus one: Who? What? When? Where? Why? and Wherefore?

Who? Who are the people involved? Make note of everything said about the people in the text and also what the people in the text say themselves.

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What? See what's happening in the text. What are the events and their order? What's happening to the characters? If the text is arguing a point, what is the point? What is the argument? What is the writer trying to communicate? Another excellent question to ask is what's wrong with this picture? See how partial obedience to God is disobedience to God.

Where? Where is the narrative taking place? The location is important. Where are the characters going or coming from? Where is the writer writing from? Where are the people he's writing to? Having a set of biblical maps or an atlas is very useful when studying Scripture.

When? When did they take place? And when did they take place in relation to the other events of Scripture?

Why? Why did God put this in the narrative? There is simply an infinite number of why questions to ask. Why is where we dig for meaning. Why is where we come to new insights.

Wherefore? What difference does this make in your life? This is the action question that gets us doing something about what we read. The bible is written to transform lives ... my life and your life.

5. Read Prayerfully

Prayer is the key to effective bible study.

Don't try to imitate the prayers of others. It's *personal* time between you and God so talk to God as you would your spouse, child, boss, co-worker, friend, or neighbor.

Do turn Scriptures into prayers. When we remind God of all His promises we are in fact reminding ourselves that we can have the full assurance and faith in God to keep His promises.

Focus first upon the person to whom the prayer is addressed ... GOD. We all too often place ourselves as the principal object of prayer. Get in the habit of making God the first focus. Remind ourselves of just who God is and whom we're addressing.

Confess our sinfulness before God in prayer. God loves us in spite of our best efforts to please Him. We fail miserably even when we think we succeed. Acknowledge our depravity before our holy, righteous and perfect God.

Stand upon the promises of God in prayer. Our petition to God should be based upon His promises to His people. Focus upon our needs by leaning upon the promises of God.

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Psalm 119 is a good example of prayerful bible study. If we read the prayers of the bible, from Genesis through Revelation, we'll see the pattern described above to be the consistent pattern of prayer throughout Scripture: Adoration – Confession – Petition.

6. Read Imaginatively

Use different translations of the bible. Avoid becoming stoic through the exclusive use of a single translation.

Rewrite the text in your own words. See if you can *correctly* paraphrase the main points and central ideas of the specific verse.

Read the text out loud. This will also help you to remember the verse and to memorize the verse. Having someone else read it will also help.

Vary your setting. Try to duplicate the setting where the verse is taking place if possible. Read near a lake, or in the country.

Read the Scripture in different languages. If you are bi-lingual, try reading the Scriptures in the languages you understand.

7. Read Meditatively

Learn to *reflect* upon the text. Though this is difficult for many in today's instant gratification society, we need to learn it takes time to become holy.

Learn to act upon the text. Obedience to God is the fruit of knowing God. When we reflect and meditate upon His Word, we begin to live in accordance to His Word. We are what we think.

Be willing to program our mind with the wisdom of God as revealed in Scripture. God's Word is God speaking to you individually and personally. Bathe your mind in the waters of God's Word so that you may become pleasing in His sight.

Transformation through meditation. The Holy Spirit transforms our lives as we meditate deeply upon the Word of God. Biblical meditation means *filling* up our minds with the things of God ... not emptying our minds via worldly meditation. The greater the permeation of God's Word into our psyche, the greater the life changing ways of the Lord upon our lives.

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8. Read Purposefully

Second Timothy 3:16-17 gives four purposes of Scripture: To teach, reprove, correct and instruct in righteous living.

Look for the aim of the author. Our challenge is to discern the meaning of every verse of Scripture.

Purpose through Grammatical Structure: The bible is not cavalier in its choice of words and their order. In fact, grammar determines doctrine.

Verbs: Verbs are the critical action words that tell us who is doing what.

Subject & Object: The subject does the acting and the object is that which is acted upon.

Modifiers: Descriptive words such as adjectives and adverbs. They tend to enlarge the meaning of the words they modify.

Prepositional Phrases: The little words that tell you where the action is taking place. Words like *in, on, upon, by, through, to*, and so on.

Connectives: Words like *and, but, or, therefore, except*, are very powerful. They are used to pinpoint, include or exclude and are essential for correct understanding.

Purpose through Literary Structure: In addition to grammatical structure, biblical writers communicate meaning and purpose through literary structure.

Biographical Structure: They build upon key persons in the story. For example; Genesis 12-50 builds upon the key persons and experiences of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph.

Geographical Structure: here is where the focus is upon a key place. For example, the Garden of Eden for Adam and Eve; The places that Israel visits between Egypt and the Promised land.

Historical Structure: Key events are the basis of historical structure. The books of Joshua, John and Revelation are good examples.

Chronological Structure: This is similar to historical structure where the author organizes material around key times. This usually carries a temporal progression with a sequential unfolding of events.

Ideological Structure: Structured around central themes, ideas and concepts such as Paul's writings.

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Chart: Laws of Structure

LAW	DESCRIPTION	EXAMPLES
Cause & Effect	One event, concept or action that causes another (key terms: therefore, so, then, as a result)	Mark 11:27-12:44 Romans 1:24-32; 8:18-30
Climax	A progression of events or ideas that climb to a certain high point before descending	Exodus 40:34-35 2 Samuel 11 Mark 4:35-5:43
Comparison	Two or more elements that are alike or similar (key terms: like, as, to, also)	Psalm 1:3-4 John 3:8, 12, 14 Hebrews 5:1-10
Contrast	Two or more elements that are unlike or dissimilar (key terms: but, yet)	Psalm 73 Acts 4:32-5:11 Galatians 5:19-23
Explanation or Reason	The presentation of an idea or event followed by its interpretation	Daniel 2, 4-5, 7-9 Mark 4:13-20 Acts 11:1-18
Interchange	When the action, conversation, or concept moves to another, then back again	Genesis 37-39 1 Samuel 1-3 Luke 1-2
Introduction & Summary	Opening or concluding remarks on a subject or situation	Genesis 2:4-25; Joshua 12 Matthew 6:1
Pivot or Hinge	A sudden change in the direction or flow of the context; a minor climax	2 Samuel 11-12 Matthew 12 Acts 2
Proportion	Emphasis indicated by the amount of space the writer devotes to a subject	Genesis 1-11; 12-50 Luke 9:51-19:27 Ephesians 5:21-6:4
Purpose	A declaration of the author's intentions	John 20:30-31; Acts 1:8 Titus 1:1
Question and Answer	The use of questions or questions and answers	Malachi; Mark 11:27-12:44 Luke 11:1-13
Repetition	Terms or phrases used two or more times	Psalm 136; Hebrews 11 Matthew 5:21-48
Specific to General and General to Specific	Progression of a thought from a single example to a general principle, or visa versa	Matthew 6:1-18 Acts 1:8 James 2

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9. Read Acquisitively

We need to read and study the bible with the purpose of retaining that which is contained within the text. But, let not our minds be so open that it gives occasion for our brains to fall out. For God Words to transform our lives we must retain, claim and take ownership of what we read so we can act upon it.

We retain 10% of what we hear; 50% of what we see and hear; 90% of what we see, hear and do.

Get involved in the process. Find creative ways to see, hear and do what the Scriptures teach.

10. Read Telescopically

We must read the parts of the bible in the context of the whole bible. In other words, we must always remember the big picture. The bible is an integrated message in which the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.

Look for Connectives: Look for the key terms *but*, *and*, and *therefore* that serve to connect and link together the various parts of the whole. The connectives demand that these parts be tied together in your mind.

Pay attention to Context. Always consult the neighbors of the text to determine the broader context. Context demands a wide angle lens in addition to the close-ups.

Evaluate the passage in light of the book as a whole. This is the ultimate extension of context.

Look at the historical context of the book. History lends relevance to otherwise insignificant details. God is the God of history. God works in and through real people living in the real world to accomplish His purposes. We can learn a lot about God's purposes through telescopic reading. Secondary sources are very useful in determining the historical context of the books of Scripture.

Work With A Paragraph

The paragraph is the basic unit of study, not the verse, not the chapter because the paragraph is a group of related sentences and statements that deal with one main topic or idea and represents a complete thought.

Check the context. Look for connectives and read what it's connecting.

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Label your observations. Make a one word or short phrase summary of what you see and what you're reading.

No detail is trivial. All facts and words are present in Scripture under divine inspiration. There is a reason and purpose for everything that is written.

Six Clues To Look For In Scripture

When studying Scripture there are six things you should pay particular attention to.

1. Things That Are Emphasized

The bible uses several means to emphasize material. Here are but four.

Amount of Space. How much space is being devoted to the subject? And what is being emphasized? The more space devoted to a subject, topic or event is indicative to how important it is to God that we learn or comprehend what is being communicated. Things that are emphasized within that highlight the most important aspects within the context of the subject(s) being discussed.

Stated Purpose. The authors will often come right out and state why they are recording what they do.

Order. What is the strategic placement of the subject, events or people in the material? The order and placement will often yield great insights into the text.

Movement. From lesser to greater and the greater to lesser. Often the writer will build up to a climax where he presents key information. This key information is referred to as the *pivot*. We'll often see things rising to this pivot then descending from the pivot.

2. Things That Are Repeated

Repetition is without doubt one of the most powerful tools of teaching. Repetition reinforces the importance of the material being presented. Look for what is being repeated, and the context for the repetition.

Terms, Phrases and Clauses. Look for key terms, phrases and clauses that are often repeated. For example, in Psalm 136, the phrase, *His love endures forever* is repeated 26 times.

Characters. The frequency and context of the appearances of people in Scripture.

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Incidents and Circumstances. The repetition of certain acts of God help define who God is. For example, when dealing with ancient Israel, God defines His love for Israel as “*The God who brought you out of the house of bondage.*”

Another example is the tension between Jesus and the Pharisees in the book of Matthew. Matthew illustrates that the pivotal event in Jewish history was elusive to the Jews for the Law had surpassed the Law-giver as their focus of worship.

Patterns. A related situation is the creation of repeating patterns. There are parallels between the life of Joseph of the Old Testament and Jesus. Juxtapositions are also commonplace as between Saul, the people’s choice and David, God’s choice.

New Testament Use of Old Testament Passages. It is significant to recall all the uses of the Old Covenant Scriptures in the new Covenant. There is a continuity between the two covenants.

3. Things That Are Related

Look for the ties that bind things together in Scripture. This is not referring to their proximity to verses and passages but to their *relationship* with other passages.

Movement: From General to Specific. This is the relationship between the whole and its parts; the categories and its members; between the big picture and the details. Often when a godly principle is give, it is followed by one or more specific details. Matthew 6:1-18 and Genesis 1:1-13 are but two such examples.

Questions and Answers. The question is one of the most powerful tools of communication. The book of Romans is a classic example of the use of this communication technique as is Job 38-41 when God sarcastically calls Job onto the carpet. Questions and answers demand attention. They’re important keys to unlocking the text.

Cause and Effect. Events put into motion that have a cascading effect, like dominoes tumbling upon one another. One example of this in Scripture is Acts 8:1-4. The persecution of Stephen (cause) lead to evangelism abroad (effect.)

4. Things That Are Alike

Similarities tend to stand out in bible study. We call these things similes and metaphors.

Similes. A simile is often referred to as a figure of speech. The two most common terms to be on the lookout for similes are *like* and *as*. These are word pictures that draw comparisons between two things. Some Scripture examples are Psalm 42:1; 1 Peter 2:2; and Isaiah 44:6-7. The verse in Isaiah paints a simile that has no similarity. God asks a rhetorical question with Him saying,

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“Who is *like* the Lord?” The answer is no one nor is anything like the Lord. Here the work like highlights a contrast for only God is like God.

Metaphors. Metaphors are like similes except without the use of the terms *like* or *as*. Some examples are when Jesus says He is the vine in John 15:1, and the door in John 10:7-9. Jesus is not teaching that he is some rectangular object connected to hinges nor is he saying He is a fruit bearing plant. The literal understanding of these verses must be understood as figurative language that paints a picture describing the relationship between believer, God and Himself. His use of the door metaphor illustrates how Jesus is the only entry point to God and Salvation.

5. Things That Are Unlike

In addition to similarities, contrasts tend to stand out as well. They're the flip side of comparisons. The key term for contrasts is the term *but*.

But. This is a clue that a change of direction is coming. The use of but is to indicate a contrast. When studying your bible you must look to see what contrast is being made.

Metaphors. Things that are not alike can also be seen through metaphors. A biblical example is that of the unjust judge in Luke 18 to contrast with the justice and mercy of God. Jesus is in essence teaching that if an unjust judge responds to pleas for mercy, how much more will your heavenly Father?

Irony. This is the use of words to indicate the opposite of their literal meaning. One such example is in the words of Paul as he quotes from the Old Testament to illustrate contrasts both then and now in 1 Corinthians 15:32 and Isaiah 22:13.

6. Things That Are True To Life

This speaks to the issue of authenticity. These are real people, with real problems and frailties, just like you and I. We need to examine just how these people responded to the calling of God in their lives in the context of their human reality. When we see the lives and stories of Abraham, Moses, Noah, David, Peter, John Mark, Paul and just about any biblical character in Scripture, we see sinful man coming into relationship with holy God. Look for the authenticity of the men God uses as His chosen ones.

Get The Big Picture

So far we've covered two units in bible study, the single verse and the paragraph. Now we come to the third unit, the *segment*.

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Segment. A segment is a collection of paragraphs united by a common theme. When studying segment of Scripture there are some techniques of study that will help you glean the greatest yield.

Section. A section of Scripture is usually the numbered chapters in a book. However, a section of Scripture may not precisely correspond with chapter beginnings and endings and often do not.

Overview The Segments

Create and label the segments in your study notes after reading them through. You may need to re-read them a few times to get the appropriate flow. The book uses the section of Mark 4 and 5 as an illustration to study the miracles of Jesus.

Creating A Chart

The creation of a grid chart is a useful tool of bible study. A chart is to the student of Scriptures what a map is to a seaman ... it keeps us on course. Whenever there is a lot of material, paragraphs, and segments, the creation of charts will help us to summarize the material in a manageable way. However, the goal we must keep in mind in studying the Word of God is not to produce a chart but to produce a change in how we live. **A chart is useful only to the extent that it accurately represent the truth of what is in biblical text.**

Assign Labels and Titles that Summarize Content. Here's where you can be creative and make the bible a living book for you. These will help you to retain your insights in a neat and orderly manner.

Visualize Your Chart. Ask what are the relationships? What do I want to show? What's this chart all about? How am I going to use it?

KISS. Keep It Simple, Student. Detail can always be added later. The task is to remove all clutter. The chart should prioritize the key ideas, characters, themes, verses, terms and other data. Determine the main idea and structure and know what material you want to see at a glance.

Too Much data? This is a clue that you'll need to chop it up and perhaps make several charts. It may also be a clue that that you need to go back to the text and do some more observing.

Be Creative. There are dozens of ways to show your relationships in the text. Make it work for you but remember to keep it simple.

Revise. Revise your charts in light of your study. As you continue to study, you'll gain new insights that may cause you to revise or redo your chart. A chart is a means to an end and not the end in themselves.

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Using The Chart

We can study the chart in two ways: Compositely and Comparatively. Compositely is reading across the chart, from left to right and Comparatively is reading the chart from top to bottom.

How To Study A Section

Read the entire section completely. Several readings in different translations is very useful.

Identify the paragraphs, and put a label or title on each paragraph. These labels will become useful when creating your chart.

Evaluate each paragraph in light of the other paragraphs. Use the six clues mentioned earlier to identify relationships.

Evaluate how the section as a whole relates to the rest of the book. Use the six clues here as well.

Try to state the main point of the section. Try to boil it down to a single word or phrase that summarizes the entire content

Keep a list of observations on the section. It's a good idea to record these in your bible in pencil using brief, descriptive words.

Study the persons and places mentioned. See what you can learn about them that throws light upon the section as a whole.

Keep a list of your unanswered questions and unresolved problems. These become the substance of further study.

Question Yourself. What have I learned that challenges the way I live? What practical issues does this passage address? What changes do I need to make in light of this study? What prayer should I make as a result of this study?

Share your results with someone else. The purpose of study is to share with others what God has gifted you to know and do.

INTERPRETATION

It is impossible to apply the bible to our lives unless we understand what the bible ... God ... is saying to us. We cannot act upon what the Scriptures teach unless we understand what they say and mean.

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The bible is written for our understanding, not our misunderstanding and everything written in the bibles can be understood ... IF ... we seek God to open up our minds to understand by the influence of His Holy Spirit ... AND ... we show ourselves to be diligent in seeking to know God through the study of His Word.

Interpretation Defined

Every book of Scripture has a message and that message can be understood. To interpret God's Word accurately we must begin with this fundamental premise:

Meaning is not our subjective thoughts read into the texts (eisegesis) but God's objective truth read out of the texts (exegesis)

God has a mind and He revealed His mind to us in the passages of Scripture. Our task as bible students is to think God's thoughts after Him. We're attempting to re-create and stand in the author's shoes and determine what this means to the author before we can determine what it means for us. It is impossible to know what a writer means until we know what he says.

In Observation ... we excavate
In Interpretation ... we erect
In Application ... we occupy

Interpretation: Barriers And Hazards

Time and distance have thrown up barriers between us and the biblical writers that block our understanding. However, none of these are insurmountable, though they are formidable. There are tools that we can use to overcome all barriers and hazards.

The barriers include: language, cultural, literary, communication and faulty interpretations. Listed below is a chart that lists the tools and resources to help us overcome the barriers. More on the use of consultation tools on page 22.

Resource	Description	Barrier Overcome
Atlases	Collection of maps showing places mentioned in the texts. May have descriptions of history & significance	Geographic
Bible Dictionaries	Explains origin, meaning and use of key words and terms in the text	Language
Bible Handbooks	Presents helpful information on subjects in the text	Cultural
Interlinear Texts	Translations with the Greek or Hebrew text positioned in between the lines for comparison	Language

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Resource	Description	Barrier Overcome
Concordances	Listing of Greek, Hebrew and Aramaic words, with definitions and their occurrences in the text	Language, Translation
Commentaries	Presentation of a biblical scholar's study of the text	Language, cultural, literary

Misreading The Text

Learning how to read is indispensable to proper understanding of the Word of God. Ignorance of what the text says is the unpardonable sin of biblical interpretation. It shows you've not done your homework and have skipped the first step of sound bible study ... Observation.

Distorting and Twisting The Text

Distortions and twisting take the form of manipulating the text to give the appearance of having it say what they wanted it to say ... not what it does say. It's one thing to have difficulty in understanding the Word of God ... that happens to every individual seeking to know God through the study of His Word *without exception* ... but its entirely a different matter to distort the meaning of God's Word, that's unacceptable and the haven for the myriad of cults and deceivers. That's a serious offense and one that will bring judgment upon those distorting and twisting the very Word of God. We must exercise caution and *learn* how to rightly handle the word of truth.

Contradicting The Text

Contradiction is even worse than textual distortions, for that calls God a liar. Satan is the father of lies and uses contradiction as his favorite tool of deception to lead people away from God. (Genesis 3:1-4 with Genesis 2:16-17; John 8:44)

One of the favorite strategies is for Satan to use the words of God to authorize a belief or practice that goes against the character of God.

Subjectivism

The meaning of the text is in the text ... not in our *subjective* response to the text. There are way too many professing Christians willing to tolerate mysticism in reading their bibles that they would not tolerate or allow in any other realm. They violate every tenet of reason and common sense. Their bible study is totally subjective and emotional. Having an emotional reaction to God's Word is not a problem, but only accepting those teachings that create a positive emotional reaction as sound is completely false and arbitrary.

Too many people believe in blind faith ... one that requires closing your eyes, taking a deep breath and believing what we know deep down is fallaciously incredible. As a

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result, many observers have come to perceive Christianity as the non-thinking man's religion. The bible teaches us just the opposite as Jesus Himself illustrates..

Matthew 22:37

And He (Jesus) said to him, "'YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND.'

Becoming a Christian does not mean putting your mind in neutral, nor having it so open that your brain falls out. The bible does not yield its fruit to the lazy and that means the intellectually indolent.

Relativism

Some people falsely assume that the bible is relative in meaning ... that it meant one thing when it was written, but an entirely different thing today. The Scriptures *DO NOT* change their meaning over time ... Scriptural interpretation and meaning is not relative.

Passages of Scripture may have any number of practical applications to the lives of believers, but, ... there is only *one* true, proper and correct meaning of every passage of Scripture. That ultimate meaning is the intent and meaning of the author ... God ... at the time He inspired His chosen author to write it down. We must reconstruct that message if we want to have an accurate understanding.

Pride

Pride comes before the fall. It is true that no one can have a complete and full understanding of the entirety of the word of God. How can a finite mind fully comprehend the infinite mind? The answer is ... he can't.

However, this is not to say that one cannot come to correct conclusions as to the meaning of the text. God's intention is to deliver to his finite image of himself ... man revelation of who He is, who we are, and why we need Jesus as the only way to a saving relationship with Himself. The bible is written for our understanding, not for our misunderstanding. We can come to clear conclusions on what the text is teaching and have complete confidence in what the text means and know in absolute terms what we are to believe.

Conflict

It is inevitable that when it comes to interpretation, there will be people who come to different conclusions as to what the correct interpretation ought to be. We must remember that a conflict in the meaning of the text is *NOT* due to the text itself but in our limited, finite understanding of the text. There is only one correct interpretation of all passages of Scripture. The task of all Christians is to seek, without prejudice, the correct and proper meaning of the text.

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Chart: Literary Genres of Scripture

Genre	Characteristics	Books-Examples
Apocalyptic	Dramatic, highly symbolic material; vivid imagery; stark contrasts; events take place on a global scale; frequently narrated in first-person eyewitness account;	Revelation
Biography	Close-up view of a person's life; often portrayed in contrast to someone else; selected events reveal character development either positively (comedy) or negatively (tragedy)	Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Saul, David, Elijah, Jesus
Encomium	Sings high praise of someone or something; rehearses in glowing terms the subjects origins, acts, attributes, superiority; exhorts the reader to incorporate the same features into his own life	1 Sam 2:1-10; Ps 19, 119; Prov 8:22-36, 31:10-31; Sg of Sol; Jn 1:1-18; 1 Cor 13; Col 1:15-20; Heb 1-3
Exposition	Carefully reasoned argument or explanation; well organized; logical flow; terms are crucial; builds to logical, compelling climax; aim is agreement and action	Paul's Epistles; Hebrews; James; 1 and 2 Peter; 1,2 & 3 John; Jude
Narrative	Broad category where a story is prominent; includes historical accts; structure conveyed through plot; characters undergo psychological and spiritual development; selected events used to convey meaning, often juxtaposed for contrast & comparison	Genesis – Ezra The gospels Acts
Oratory	Stylized oral presentation of an argument; uses formal conventions of rhetoric & oratory; frequently quotes from well known authorities; usually intended to exhort & persuade.	John 13-17; Acts 7, 17:22-31, 22:1-21, 24:10-21, 26:1-23
Parable	Brief oral story illustrating moral truth; frequently relies on stock characters & stereotypes; presents scenes and activities common to everyday life; encourages reflection & self-evaluation	2 Sam 12:1-6 Eccl 9:14-16 Matt 13:1-53 Mark 4:1-34 Luke 15:1-16:31
Pastoral	Literature dealing with rural, rustic themes, esp. shepherds; heavy on description; lean on action; often meditative & quiet; emphasize bond	Ps 23 Isaiah 40:11 John 10:1-18

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Genre	Characteristics	Books-Examples
	between shepherd and sheep; idealized presentation of life away from urban evils	
Poetry	Verse intended to be spoke or sung rather than read; emphasis on cadence and the sounds of words; vivid images and symbols; appeal to emotions; employ features of encomium, pastoral & other literary styles; Heavy parallelism in OT	Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes Song of Solomon
Prophecy	Strident, authoritative presentation of God's will and words; frequently intended as corrective, motivational, change through warnings; fortells God's plans in response to human choices.	Isaiah – Malachi
Proverb	Short, pithy statement of moral truth; reduces life to black-n-white categories; often addressed to youth; frequent use of parallelism; points readers to the right way and away from evil; heavy use of metaphors and similes	Proverbs
Satire	Exposes and ridicules human vice and foolishness; employed by various literary styles, especially narrative, biography & proverb; warns through negative modeling	Prov 24:30-34 Ezekiel 34 Luke 18:1-8 2 Cor 11:1 - 12:1
Tragedy	Relates downfall of a person; uses selected events to show path to ruin; problems usually revolve around a critical flaw in character & moral choice; warns through negative modeling	Lot, Samson, Saul, Acts 5:1-11
Wisdom Literature	Broad category where an older, more seasoned person relates wisdom to the younger; may use parable; gives observations on fundamental areas of life: birth, death, work, money, power, time, the earth etc.; appeals on basis of human experience	Job, Proverbs, Psalm 37, 90 Ecclesiastes

Five Keys To Biblical Interpretation

1. Content

There is a direct cause-effect relationship between content and meaning. The more time spent in developing your Observation skills, the less time required in Interpretive skills. Know the content of the passage in order to derive meaning.

2. Context

The 66 books of the bible hang together as one book, as a unified whole. Context refers to that which goes before a given passage and that which follows after it. Every major cult is built upon a violation of the principle of context.

Literary Context

The literary context is the words before and after the verse being studied. It is the paragraph of which that verse is part of, the section of which that paragraph is part of, and the book of which that section is part of. Considering the unity of Scripture, the ultimate context of any book is the entire bible.

Historical Context

When is this taking place? Where does this passage fit in history? What influence were upon the writer in terms of his social, political, and technological surroundings as well as those to who he was writing?

Cultural Context

Culture has a powerful and profound influence on communications, and the biblical cultures have a profound influence upon the creation of the bible.

Geographical Context

Geography is a fascinating subject that is incredibly relevant to the interpretation of Scripture. Knowing the terrain, the topographical features, weather patterns, unique aspects of the city, town or region in question, transportation routes, populations, location and layout will offer profound insights to biblical interpretation.

Theological Context

What did this writer know about God? What was the relationship of his readers to God? How were the people worshipping God at the point of the writing? How much Scripture did the audience and writer have access to? What other religions and worldviews were competing for influence?

The bible is a book written over a span of 1400 years and with more than 40 writers. It was not dropped out the sky all at once but was progressively revealed and now is a finished work. We need to see where and how a given passage fits in with the unfolding of Scripture.

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3. Comparison

Comparison is comparing Scripture with Scripture, for the *greatest* interpreter of Scripture is the Scriptures themselves. You very rarely have to go outside of the bible to explain anything in the bible. The more you compare Scripture with Scripture, the more the meaning of the bible becomes apparent.

When comparing Scripture with Scripture, an indispensable tool will be your biblical concordance. A concordance is a tool that enables you to chase down terms and concepts from one book of the bible to the next. You can put things together that appear isolated in the text, and they take on greater meaning in relation to each other.

In addition to word studies, a concordance is a useful tool in engaging in character studies. Look up the names Moses, Joseph, King David or any other biblical character and thoroughly read all the chapters and books that highlight their lives. Apply the techniques of Observation, Interpretation and Application (coming next) to understanding these characters. How prominent are they in Scripture? What does God have to say about them? Who are their relatives? What is significant in their lives?

4. Culture

When studying the bible, it is useful to see it in terms of its background, with the right light shining upon it to capture its meaning. Re-create the culture of the day and the text is sure to come alive, vibrant in meaning and application today.

5. Consultation Tools

The use of secondary resources can shed much light upon the biblical text and help make sense of what you're looking at. We are neither the first, nor the last ones the Holy Spirit is using to guide into understanding the true meaning of God's very own words. Use what God has put before us.

Resource	Description	Barrier Overcome
Atlases	Collection of maps showing places mentioned in the texts. May have descriptions of history & significance	Geographic
Bible Dictionaries	Explains origin, meaning and use of key words and terms in the text	Language
Bible Handbooks	Presents helpful information on subjects in the text	Cultural
Interlinear Texts	Translations with the Greek or Hebrew text positioned in between the lines for comparison	Language
Concordances	Listing of Greek, Hebrew and Aramaic words, with definitions and their occurrences in the text	Language, Translation
Commentaries	Presentation of a biblical scholar's study of the text	Language, cultural, literary

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Concordances

An exhaustive concordance is without a doubt one of the most useful tool that any serious student of Scripture cannot do without. A concordance is like a word index to the particular translation of the bible. It lists all the words of the text alphabetically, with references for where they appear along with a few of the surrounding words to give some context. A good concordance will also provide you with the meanings of all the original Greek, Hebrew and Aramaic word definitions the text is translated from.

Concordances have valuable uses to those studying the bible, some of which will be listed here. In the concordance itself, next to the individual verse listings you will notice a number. Every word in the bible has been assigned a number and cataloged so we can see how and where this word has been used. Pay particular attention to the numbers in the text. It is common to see several different words in the Greek, if using the New Testament, or the Hebrew in the Old, to translate different words as one English word.

One such example is the use of the term joy in the book of Philippians. In chapter 2:2 the word joy is translated from the Greek word *chara*, number 5479. In verse 2:17, the word joy is translated from a different word, *sugchairo*, number 4796. Read the word definitions in the back of the book and note the similarities and contrasts. This is a useful and exciting study to do with concordances.

Word Studies. How are the words of Scripture used throughout Scripture? This is useful for comparative studies and character studies. Obscure words may also be studied and understood through the use of an exhaustive concordance. It will help you to compare Scripture with Scripture which is the best way to understand the meanings of biblical terms.

Passage Location. Have you ever recalled a verse that is perfect for your discussion of a topic or useful to aid or comfort a person in distress, but can't remember where it's located? I hope I'm not alone in that frustration. A concordance can help you find the exact location of your passage with the use of certain key words within the text.

Bible Dictionaries

Bible dictionaries provide loads of helpful information on subjects in the text. Recent archeological studies have shed a great deal of light upon biblical studies, so much so that we now have more information on the historical facts that serve to corroborate biblical truth and expand the universe of knowledge to the student of Scripture.

Bible Handbooks

Handbooks are like a one volume encyclopedias. They provide background material for the books of the bible and offer insights to key biblical events, economics, finance, culture, politics and the like. A good tool to make the bible come alive and put in context the biblical realities at the time the books were written.

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Atlases

Geography is a helpful science to bible study. Most are more than just maps, though the maps are an essential tool of what the topography and geography was at the time the biblical books were written.

Commentaries

Though commentaries are useful sources for biblical insight, I've seen too many problems associated with these tools by some students of Scripture. Commentaries do not replace the work of private, individual bible study and one must recognize that commentaries do not carry the same weight as Scriptures ... Scripture is inspired ... commentaries are not. One should never rely too heavily upon one specific commentator. All are useful if used wisely and judiciously. Do not become dependent upon commentaries as a substitute for familiarity with the biblical texts. I've come across to many people who study commentaries more than they do Scripture.

Figuring Out The Figurative

Many errors in biblical interpretation lies in the area of not making correct distinctions between literal and figurative language. To interpret that which should be taken literally as figurative, and that which should be taken figuratively as literal have led many down the path of error, falsehood, apostasy, cults, and ungodly and unbiblical teachings and beliefs. Scripture is replete with figurative language. For example, when Jesus states, "I am the door" in John 10:7-9. Are we to understand this as Jesus being some rectangular thing hanging on hinges that swings open with latches? Of course not, that would be absurd even to the unbiblical and the novice. Or in Genesis 49:9, when Jacob calls his son Judah a "lion's whelp" is that literal or figurative language?

When we speak of literal interpretation, we are seeking about understanding the literal *meaning* of the language in its normal sense. So how do we figure out the figurative? Here are 10 principles to consider.

10 Principles For Literal Vs Figurative

1. Use the Literal Sense Unless There's a Good Reason Not To.

The writers of Scripture were normal, rational people who communicate in the same basic way we do. Do not attempt to "spiritualize" the text by attempting to make it say something other than what it plainly does say. For example, some taught that the Song of Solomon was a book written as an allegory to depict the relationship between Jesus Christ and His church. That interpretation simply does not fit with the text. The simpler and probably more correct interpretation is the poem was written to celebrate erotic love in marriage, just what God intended one of the purposes of marriage to be.

2. Use The Figurative Sense When the Passage Tells You To Do So.

Whenever you come across a dream or vision in Scripture, you can expect to find symbolic language because that's the language of dreams.

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3. Use The Figurative if a Literal Meaning is Impossible or Absurd.

God does not shroud Himself in mysticism and enigma. God has *revealed* Himself through His written Word *to those who believe and obey Him*. Revelation of oneself is for the purpose to be known ... and God wants us to know Him ... and to come into relationship with Him in sincerity and truth.

Yes, God does often use symbolism to make His points, but He also expects us to see these as symbols, not absurdities. Figurative language is descriptive, precise and literal in meaning and intent. One such example is when you compare and contrast the use of the term sword in Hebrews 4:12 and Revelation 1:16. The terms are different and both have different meanings. One is literal and the other figurative. Compare the two for yourself to see what the text is teaching us.

4. Use The Figurative if a Literal Meaning Involves Immorality or Sin

John 6:53-55 is a classic example of this point. Is Jesus advocating cannibalism? It is absurd and immoral to think or imply so for that is a repulsive violation of God's Law as revealed in the Old Testament. *God NEVER violates His character*. God's Word is based on His character, as are His commandments, precepts, laws, and covenants. God will never ask us to do something He would not do, nor done, Himself. God's perfection and holiness demands it.

5. Use The Figurative if the Expression is an Obvious Figure of Speech.

The text itself signals its use of figures of speech. The chart in the next section outlines the different types of figures of speech. The biblical texts use all the listed figures of speech, so we need to learn how to identify them.

6. Use The Figurative Sense if a Literal Meaning Goes Contrary To Context & Scope of the Passage.

In Revelation 5:1-5 we read about "the Lion of Judah." The writer is not talking about a literal beast but is using a title given to Messiah Jesus. Context is often your best guide to understanding the meaning of the text.

7. Use The Figurative if a Literal Meaning Goes Contrary to the General Character and Style of the Book.

This is the natural extension of principle #6 above. The context of any verse is the passages before and after the verse, the paragraph, the section, the book in which it is written and ultimately the whole of the bible itself. This principle applies especially to two types of literature:

Prophetic: Often makes sense only when read figuratively

Poetic: Often employs imaginative language as matter of routine.

8. Use The Figurative if a Literal Meaning Goes Contrary to the Plan and Purpose of the Author.

Context is crucial. Ask yourself if it fits in the proper context with the other verses. It may

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sound plausible when taken alone, but how does it fit in with the text? Let's go to Psalm 1:1-3 as an example. The psalmist is speaking about a person who turns away from wickedness and rests in the council of The LORD. Verse three adds that he will be like a tree firmly planted by the water, which yields it fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. He shall prosper in whatever he does.

Some people proclaim that this verse guarantees material prosperity and financial wealth to *every* believer, but is this truly what the verse is teaching? Does this interpretation fit the context or the purpose of the writer?

Hardly! The psalmist, when looking at the entirety of psalm 1 and the rest of the psalms is far more concerned about people's walk with God than they were with their financial well being. This makes most sense when we consider that it describes the *quality* of a person's outcome, not the quantity of material blessings he enjoys.

9. Use The Figurative if a Literal Meaning is Contradictory to Other Scripture.

The GREATEST INTERPRETER of Scripture is Scripture. The bible is unified in its message. Although it sometimes confronts us with paradox ... it never confounds us with contradiction.

Jesus says it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of God in Mark 10:25. While Jesus is NOT saying there is no Salvation for the rich, neither is He saying that those saved will become rich either. God's inspired Word through Paul teaches us the dangers and pitfalls of seeking material wealth over the true spiritual wealth, (1 Timothy 6:17-19) and Jesus warns also of the inherent conflict between seek material verse spiritual wealth. (Matthew 6:24)

The balance of Scripture certainly does put this in perspective and refutes the notion that God *guarantees* material wealth to those who obey Him.

10. Use The Figurative if a Literal Meaning Would Involve a Contradiction in Doctrine.

This follows the point just made above. We need to be consistent in our interpretation of Scripture and in the systems of belief we build using Scripture.

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Chart: Figures of Speech

Figure of Speech	Meaning	Example
Anthropomorphism	The attribution of human features or actions to God, or anything else not human.	Isaiah 59:1
Apostrophe	Addressing a thing as if it were a person, or an absent or imaginary person as if he were present.	1 Cor 15:55
Euphemism	The use of less offensive expressions to indicate a more offensive one	Galatians 5:12
Hyperbole	Exaggeration to say more than is literally meant	2 Cor 11:8
Hypocatastasis	A comparison in which likeness is implied rather than stated directly	Luke 12:1
Idiom	An expression peculiar to a particular people	Judges 15:1
Merism	A substitution of two contrasting or opposite parts for the whole	Psalms 39:2
Metaphor	A comparison in which one thing represents another	Matthew 5:14
Paradox	A statement that seems absurd, self-contradictory, or contrary to logical thought	Matthew 16:25
Personification	Ascribing human characteristics or actions to inanimate objects or animals	Isaiah 24:23
Rhetorical Question	A question that requires no response, yet forces the reader to answer mentally and consider its ramifications	Psalms 56:11
Simile	A comparison using <i>like</i> or <i>as</i>	Psalms 1:3

APPLICATION

Applying the Scriptures to our daily lives is the essential, yet the most neglected stage of bible study. Too much bible study begins and ends in interpretation. When that occurs, we are in essence aborting the purpose of bible study in our lives. The Word of God is written and studied to transform lives and not to satisfy our curiosity. Therefore, the purpose in reading and studying the bible is not to have us get through the bible, but to have the bible get through to us. If we are not transformed by its eternal truths, we'll be eternally condemned by those very same truths.

The truth of God is attractive for it is the very means by which ordinary people become godly people. Biblical truth is the wardrobe of the soul and far more exclusive than any outfit we can buy from the most renowned designers. There is a danger however, if we allow it to degenerate into a process that's intellectually fascinating but spiritually

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frustrating. Attractive truth is applied truth. It is not enough for us to get into the Word of God, for we must allow the Word of God to get into us. Then, and only then will it make a permanent difference in our character and conduct. That is the true challenge and goal of effective bible study.

Fallacious Substitutes For Application

Why do we not apply the Word of God to our lives? Conviction! The Word convicts us of our sins and demonstrates just how sinful we are. Even professing Christians shy away from this area of our lives. It's also the reason why so much apostasy, false teachings, cults and the like are so prevalent ... human nature only seeks to hear smooth things, nice things, things that make us feel good as we are. To admit the need to change is to admit we are not right, and most will admit that they're not perfect in order to remain as they are. That attitude is spiritual death. Let's examine four areas that most professing Christians substitute for application.

Interpretation Substituted For Application

How easy it is to settle for knowledge rather than experience in action. To know and not to do is not to know at all. As God's Word clearly states, "But *prove* yourselves *doers* of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks at his natural face in a mirror; for once he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was. But one who looks intently at the perfect law, the law of liberty, and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man will be blessed in what he does." (James 1:22-25)

Those not transformed by God's word, yet claim salvation are deluded. Faith is the spiritual gift to act upon that which we have been given to know. Lack of involvement is not the perspective of Scripture. The moment we come to know God's truth, the ball is in our court. We are *responsible* for putting the truth of God into action. Knowledge without obedience is sin. Listen to the words of Jesus.

Luke 12:48b

From everyone who has been given much, much will be required; and to whom they entrusted much, of him they will ask all the more.

Luke 6:46

"Why do you call Me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say?"

Matthew 7:22-23

22 "Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?'

23 "And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS.'

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Superficial Obedience Substituted For Substantive Transformation

This is probably more common among professing Christians than is the problem of interpretation listed above. We tend to “cherry pick” where God’s truth shall apply in our lives, and where it shall be omitted. The result is no noticeable change. We’ll apply truth to our immediate family but not our neighbors. We’ll apply God’s truth to our personal lives but not our business dealings. This then leads to the next fallacious substitute.

Rationalization Substituted For Repentance

Most people have a built-in early warning system that stands in opposition to spiritual change. The moment truth gets too close, too convicting, an alarm goes off and we start to defend ourselves. The favorite strategy is to rationalize sin instead of repenting from it.

We’ll hear cliché’s like, “Everyone else is doing this, why not me,” “Yes, I fudge things a bit, but it’s a cut-throat business world. I need to do this to survive,” and “Who doesn’t cheat a little on their taxes?” and the list can go on and on and on. Rationalization is our own little private energizer bunny. The worst part of this is we do not transform our lives into godliness and even worse yet, feel completely at peace and comfortable doing it. That is tragic. If not corrected in time, the older we get the more experienced we become at doing this. We now have a reservoir of reasons and responses to not change every time the truth of God begins to convict us of our sin. We’d rather justify ourselves in our mind and convince ourselves that truth is for every one else, but not me rather than stand convicted and justified by Christ Jesus.

Emotional Experiences Substituted For Volitional Decisions

We study God’s Word, emotive under impact, yet make no real change in our lives. If watering our handkerchiefs with a few mournful prayers is the only response we give God, then go our merry way without a life changing transformation, then we’ve not grown spiritually one iota. Our spirituality is nothing more than an empty void and a vapid emotional experience. That is not godliness.

Having an emotional experience is not a bad thing, we need much more of it today for sure, but if never goes beyond it, we have not taken a step toward knowing God and have not grown in our personal relationship[with God at all. An emotional response to God’s truth is good only if *coupled with* a volitional response to God and His truth. If we do not evoke substantive, fundamental, life transforming decisions based upon what the Scriptures say and teach, then what have we really gained? What impact has the Word of God had upon our lives? ... Upon the lives of others we come in contact with?

We must never become complacent by merely being exposed to God’s truth and being convicted by it ... we must become transformed by its life-changing truths. If change does not take place, it begs the question whether we really love God or not. Jesus equates love with obedience; if we love God we’ll obey God.

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John 14:31a

but so that the world may know that I love the Father, *I do exactly* as the Father commanded Me.

Italics added to the above passage. Jesus did exactly what the Father commanded Him to do, and this obedience was done so that the world may know love, Jesus' love for the Father is expressed through obedience. Obedience for us brings about blessings from God. We all want God's blessings, but are we responding to His revelation by applying His eternal truths in our lives?

Four Steps In Application

The Christian Paradox: Spiritual growth is a commitment to change, yet the human heart resists nothing more strongly than change. Many professing Christians will do anything to avoid change. If your spirit is to allow God to change your heart, but the heart is resistant to change, please follow these four principles to assist you in overcoming your resistance.

1. Know

A. Know the Text

The first thing is to know the correct Interpretation of the Biblical text. Application is based upon Interpretation, so if your Interpretation of the text is erroneous, your application of the text will probably be erroneous as well. A correct interpretation will enhance proper application.

There is only **ONE CORRECT INTERPRETATION** of Biblical text.

There are **MANY APPLICATIONS** of the Biblical texts.

Implication: Be CAREFUL how you Interpret Scripture. Errors will multiply if you start with a faulty Interpretation. The better you understand the passage the better you can correctly apply it to your life.

B. Know Yourself

You must know yourself in addition to knowing the text. Listen to what God has to say on this.

1 Timothy 4:16

Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching; persevere in these things, for as you do this you will ensure salvation both for yourself and for those who hear you.

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It is critical that you know your assets and liabilities ... your strengths and your weaknesses. Knowing your assets will help develop your confidence. Knowing your liabilities will help you develop your faith. Your assets tell you what God has done for you. Your liabilities tell you what God is going to do for you.

2. Relate

Once we know the truth of the Word of God, we must relate it to our experience. Christianity is best understood as a series of new relationships.

2 Corinthians 5:17

Therefore if anyone is in Christ, [he is] a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.

Once you become a Christian, Christ become the center of your life and once there, affects every area of your life. The dynamic process of the Christian life is to seek Christ's renewal of every area of your life. Which parts of your life have you not ceded control over to Lord Jesus? The dysfunctional Christian is the one who retains control over one or more aspects of His life apart from the Lordship of Jesus. What parts of your life are not surrendered to God? The process of surrender is lifelong as we continue to learn the holy and perfect will of God for our lives through the study of His Word.

The area we can relate the word of God to our lives is centered in our varied relationships.

A New Relationship To God: He is now your heavenly Father. You have a new and personal relationship with Him.

A New Relationship To Yourself: You develop a new self image in Christ Jesus your Lord. You are very significant to God for He has made you a new creation in Him. Your life begins to take on new meaning and purpose.

A New Relationship To Others: You'll discover that other people are not the enemy but the deceived victims of the real enemy. You'll begin to treat them as Christ would treat them.

A New Relationship To The Enemy: You've just switched sides in the battle. You're no longer the pawn of Satan for sin, but to God for righteousness. The enemy is not well pleased with that, so, as a result you'll find your life to be a constant battle to whom you shall serve.

The new insights you gain from Scripture need to be applied to all areas of relationships mentioned above. Notice how this will take place.

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The Word Exposes Your Sin: It helps you to remove sin in your life by first exposing it to you. 2 Timothy 3:16 tells us, “All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for *teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training* in righteousness.”

The Word Gives You God’s Promises: It tells you what you can expect from God and what you can rely on God to do. That’s comforting when we sometimes feel we’re being swallowed up in a sea of despair, and overwhelming circumstances.

The Word Gives You God’s Commands: Some of God’s promises are conditional. God always outlines His conditions clearly and succinctly. Commands and principles are laid down that lead to the spiritually rewarding life.

The Word Gives You Examples to Follow: Many of the biographies of God’s people are a source of encouragement, hope, and reality for us. Seek to follow the *positive* examples of God’s people while avoiding the negative examples of those who failed to follow God.

3. Meditate

True meditation has become a lost art in contemporary society. Unlike the meditation of eastern mysticism, which seeks to have you empty your mind, true biblical meditation is the art of filling your mind with God’s truth and to deeply ponder how it applies to our lives. Biblical Meditation is often the catalyst for God, the Holy Spirit to transform our lives. Meditation was not just for the people of yesteryear, but especially for those living in the hustle, bustle of 21st Century Christians. Christian meditation helps us to weave Scripture into the fabric of daily living.

Memorization of Scripture goes hand in hand with meditation. Key memory verses will often sustain us through the dark days that we are all bound to face in our journey to deepening our relationship with God. Memory is the key to meditation and meditation is a key to transforming your life.

4. Practice

The ultimate goal of bible study is to practice the truth. Scripture is not intended to fatten the geese but to train spiritual athletes and equip soldiers of the cross of Christ for the realities of life. *Run to Win* and *Fight to Win* is the message of The Word.

Is there some area of my life where this truth of God is needed?

While it may not be possible to apply every truth we discover in the Word of God to our lives, the passionate application of those truths is certainly our goal. Our hunger for the Word of God will be in direct proportion to our obedience to The Word. The more we understand The Word, the more we use The Word and the more we use The Word, the more we understand The Word. True observation, interpretation and application of God’s Word is cyclical as we can see. The Word of God experienced is The Word of

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God enjoyed. The bible is the divine means of bringing change into our lives. A transformed life is the first step in transforming the world, one person at a time. Start with you and see if you can become a change agent with one other person within your sphere of influence. Societies are composed of individuals and the only way to change society is to change individuals.

How Does This Apply To Me?

There is a series of questions we should be asking ourselves when examining the Word of God in terms of its application to our lives. The following is a list of questions we should be asking ourselves every time we come before God in the study of His Word.

Is There An Example For Me To Follow?

Much of the bible God inspired to be biographical. He wants His Word to come alive in us by examining the lives of those people He's revealed to us in His Word. Our challenge is to draw parallels between our situation and those of Scripture.

Is There A Sin To Avoid?

Before you became a Christian, do you recall your attitude toward sin? If someone said to you that you shouldn't do thus and such because it was sin, remember your answer? If you're like me, it was probably something like, "You gotta be kidding, right?"

God's Word will convict you of sin in your life, and what you should do about it. Don't ignore the teaching of God concerning your sins.

Is There A Promise Of God Made To Me?

God's Word is filled with His Covenants and promises. Some of God's promises to you are unconditional, there's nothing you need to do to receive the promise apart from asking the promise be delivered to you. Other promises of God are conditional. That is He promises to do certain things only if we meet His conditions for these promises. Still, other promises were made for a specific group of people, at a specific point in time; they do not apply to us but to them. Learn about the promises of God and which of them you may claim for yourself. There is a study on many of the covenants and promises of God in the topical bible study section of The Lord's Children Fellowship website:

<http://TheLordsChildren.org/>

Is There A Prayer I Can Learn from?

It would be fantastic to study the prayers in Scripture. There is just so much we can learn from some of the greats. Some prayers to get you started are: David's prayer of confession in Psalm 51; Hannah's prayer of thanksgiving for the birth of Samuel in 1 Samuel 2:1-10; Jonah's prayer from the belly of the fish in Jonah 2; Mary's prayer in Luke 1:46-55; Paul's prayer in Ephesians 3:14-21; Jesus' Garden of Gethsemane prayer in Matthew 26:36-46, Mark 14:32-42, and Luke 22:39-46. Ask yourself what and how I should be praying?

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Is There A Command To Obey?

The bible is filled with potent, clear-cut commands. There are 54 in the book of James alone. People often ask, "How do I know what God's will is for me?" It may surprise you that probably 95% of what you need to know concerning God's will for your life is recorded in Scripture. Spend your time attending to those, and the other 5% will not be too difficult to figure out.

Is There A Condition To Meet?

As mentioned earlier, many of the promises of God are conditional promises. A clue to discover conditional promises are with the "if ... then" combinations. The *if* in Scripture describes the condition, and the *then* describes the promise. One example is John 15:7 "If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you." Know the conditions and the promises. This is a good verse to apply Observation, Interpretation and Application.

Is There A Verse To Memorize?

Any verse of Scripture can be memorized, but there will always be key memory verses that carry more significance to you than others. Always start with a few key verses and then move on to paragraphs, sections, chapters and if you're really ambitious, entire books of Scripture.

Is There Theological Error To Correct?

It is simply astonishing how little of biblical Christian doctrine is known and understood by professing Christians. An unfortunate reality is many churches are not teaching biblical Christianity. Apostasy has replaced sound doctrine and emotionalism has replaced sound worship and study. What do the Scriptures teach us about the person and ministry of Jesus the prophesied messiah, God *with* us? ... The resurrection from the dead? ... The virgin birth? ... the ministry of the Holy Spirit, God *in* us? ... The inerrancy of Scripture? There are just too many non-Christian, non-biblical teachings that have permeated contemporary Christianity. Diligent bible study can help you turn this around and sort out the chaff from the truth. Be willing to make the changes when the changes become known.

Is There A Challenge To Face?

Whenever you read a portion of Scripture and become convicted that you need to act upon what you've read, REJOICE! The Spirit of God is working with you. God, the Holy Spirit will challenge, prompt, exhort, rebuke, lift up, cast down in order for you to *respond* to God's challenge for you. Is there a relationship to be restored or healed? ... An apology that needs to be made? ... The removal of something in your life that is drawing you away from God? ... A new habit you need to cultivate? Whatever it is, the Holy Spirit uses Scripture to promote changes in your life.

God's guarantee is this: If you approach God's Word with any degree of honesty and teachability, God the Holy Spirit will not let you go away disappointed.

Never Changing Truth In an Ever Changing World

The first biblical example of this appears in Genesis 2:24 where God creates marriage as the expression of His image and likeness in man.

Genesis 2:24

For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh.

This was prior to the fall and sin of man and prior to God educating man and woman on the full implications and understanding of just what that teaching means. Mistrust, pride, envy, deceit, lust have replaced communication, trust, partnership, and intimacy. Nonetheless, this teaching to become one flesh remains intact and applicable to us today though it was one of the early acts of creation. The societal context of how that “one flesh creation” applies has changed, but not the expectation of God when He created marriage to be a one flesh creation.

We read later in Genesis how ancient Israel and even the patriarchs of old had multiple wives and concubines. Polygamy was commonplace in ancient Israel. What impact did that have on the one flesh creation in marriage? A change in context, but not in content. God’s creation of marriage as a one flesh union remains.

We see Jesus’ teaching on God’s creation of marriage applicable to the first Century Jews as well. Terms of divorce was more a concern to many back then, how they could get out of a marriage, rather than how they could retain the one flesh union. There even emerged two schools of thought in Rabbinical teaching that attempted permit rampant divorce which was becoming quite commonplace in Israel. Jesus refuted the teaching by bringing His listeners back to the creation account of marriage with its full implications. They did not like hearing what Jesus had to say concerning the implications of the one flesh marriage union at all.

Matthew 19:9-10

- 9 "And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery."
10 The disciples *said to Him, "If the relationship of the man with his wife is like this, it is better not to marry."

The apostle Paul further reinforces this teaching in his letter to the Ephesian church, one of the wealthiest yet decadent cities of the Roman world. Marriage had decayed in Ephesus, divorce and remarriage was rampant, as was polygamy. Yet, God’s one flesh creation in marriage remains fully intact amid the context of Ephesian decadence.

God’s Word remains eternal and unchanging even in the context of an ever changing world. God’s truth demands we apply it to our circumstances. [God’s Word does not change to fit our cultural agenda ... our agenda changes to meet God’s truth in spite of cultural norms.](#) How we apply His Word may change, but the Word remains intact.

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Cultural Impact Upon Application

What was the culture like at the time of the writing of the Scriptures? Does a differing culture at the time the Scriptures were penned negate their meaning and applicability to us today? In a word, NO. We'll address that more specifically in the next section when we cover how to see the principles of God's message taking into consideration culture.

We need to examine the cultural aspects of then and now. Extra-biblical resources are the key to doing this. Nonetheless, when we study culture, we need to study our own as well as theirs along a common line or thread. We need to consider such area as centers of power, communication methods, the role and value of money, ethnic composition, gender roles and issues, the place, structure and influence of the family, what religious worldviews and beliefs are the dominant and influencing forces that formed and/or are changing the norms, the impact of geography have upon the culture, as well as history, arts and literature. We must first know who we are before we can understand who others are.

Scriptural Principles

How do we find the connection between the revealed truths of God's Word and the current world in which we live? Often there will not be a direct one to one relationship between Scripture with many concrete issues facing us today like genetic engineering, birth control, euthanasia, prison reform, public health, AIDS, transportation, housing and the like. The bible is not a book on biology, psychology, business, economics, or even history. When it does speak to those issues, it does so truthfully but not comprehensively. The bible is written to teach us about God and His relationship with humanity. It is our duty and responsibility as those seeking to come into a deeper and more abiding relationship with God to learn how to apply His revealed truths to our everyday lives. We'll need to think through His Word and make biblically informed choices upon how we shall live.

The bible teaches us fundamental truths or principles that God wants us to apply across the entire range of human need and experience. A principle is a succinct statement of universal truth. How that truth is applied will vary, but the truth itself remains unchanged. Principles will govern our basic attitude toward the object or thing presented. If we can learn how to *correctly* discern principles from our study of Scripture, we'll be able to bridge the gap between the ancient world of Scripture and our present world today.

Principles Should Correlate With General Biblical Teaching

This brings us back to the practice of comparing Scripture with Scripture. The more Scriptural backup we have for a principle, the more sound that principle becomes. Big trouble looms when a person finds a "principle" from a single passage of Scripture, then attempts to build a whole doctrine on the basis of that one reference. Error also occurs when someone uses Scripture to justify what Scripture clearly condemns. Caution needs to be exercised whenever we attempt to "generalize" Scripture. The Word of God can be applied broadly when applied sensibly and consistently.

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Principles Should Speak To Real Life Today.

Biblical principles should apply to the needs, interests, questions and problems facing real life today. If we become a perceptive student of our own culture and world today, we'll know where the needs and problems reside. With that information in hand, looking for general truths that apply to those circumstances should be a task we enter when engaging in our biblical studies.

Principles Should Indicate A Course of Action

For a biblical principle to be effective, it must produce a course of action. The mission of God's Word is not to tease our intellectual curiosity but to transform our lives. When we ferret out our godly principles, we need to examine how it is to be applied to our lives. What we do is far more significant in the eyes of God than what we know.

Development Of Biblically Sound Principles

Here are six questions we need to ask ourselves as we develop biblically sound principles.

1. What can you discover about the original context in which the passage was written and applied?
2. Given the original context, what does the passage mean?
3. What fundamental, universal truths are presented in this passage of Scripture?
4. Can you state that truth in a simple sentence or two, a statement that anyone can understand?
5. What issues in your own culture and your own situation does this truth address?
6. What are the implications of this principle when applied to your life and the world around you?
 - A. What changes does it require that you make?
 - B. What values does it reinforce?
 - C. What difference does it make?

How Do I Begin?

Someone once said the road to hell is paved with good intentions. Good intentions have all the value of a check from a closed account. Trying to use it becomes a criminal act. Too many get themselves all pumped up with lofty goals and grandiose schemes that

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never come to fruition. Too much “application” usually never gets off the ground. So the key is how do we transform good intentions into a life changing process?

Make The Decision To Change

Make up your mind. Determine what sort of change you need to make, and then choose to pursue it. Establish some clear and reasonable objectives. Fuzzy objectives lead to fuzzy results. Don't make your objectives too rigid or too confining either, for your doomed to fail ... again ... if you do. We are given God's Word to conform ourselves to the character of Christ. That goes well beyond pious feelings and good intentions. It penetrates to the level of our daily schedules, checkbook, friendships, jobs and family.

Clearly defined objectives help us see truth as actions, not abstractions. It keeps our expectations on the ground and within reach.

Come Up With A Realistic Plan To Change

This is a specific course of action. This is the practical phase of how you're going to get it done. If you plan is to read or memorize some Scripture, on what days and at what times will you be able to do it? How much time will you schedule for yourself, 5 minutes or 50 minutes? Be specific and write it down.

Follow Through

This means get started. The first step is always the hardest. Take it and don't put it off. If you need to rearrange your schedule ... rearrange it. If you need to buy some books ... then buy them. Whatever it is, just do it. Make sure you include God into the process.

Consider A Checklist. For example, if scripture reading is your goal, which Scriptures will you read and by when. Check them off when you get it done and give yourself some rewards for getting them accomplished. You'd like to have a record of your progress.

Get Accountability Partners. Find someone or a small group of people that share the same goals and objectives with you. These can be formal or informal arrangements, individually or in small groups.

Evaluate Your Progress. There's nothing like victories to keep the ball rolling. And when these victories are recorded, you have a record of accomplishment you can keep coming back to. A journal is one such record keeping tool. The checklist may be another. Get away for a period of time for personal reflection and meditation to evaluate what you've accomplished, where you didn't, and plan on how to turn failures into victories. Devise ways to measure your strides as you walk through life.

God Bless You in your journey of living by the book.