

How to Read the Bible – Part 2 (5 weeks)

Once you've taken "How to Read the Bible", you'll be prepared to take this more advanced class. While there are many bible study methods out there, I've chosen these below methods to teach on. There are several ways to study the bible, but they can be summarized in 2 methods:

Topical - this is where you study a topic, like 'the kingdom of heaven' or 'anger'. Use a topical bible or a concordance. An example is, go to <http://biblehub.com/topical>. Under 'Topical Search', type in the word or phrase you want to look up and click on 'topical'. Then under 'Bible Search', on the right hand side, it will list all the scriptures where your word or phrase is used. On the left-hand side, if you click on the 1st item under 'Topical Search', it will list all the scriptures where this topic is talked about.

Verse-by-Verse – this is where you study a book of the bible, like Colossians. That's what this class will be about. We're going to use a step-by-step approach.

Step 1 – using the knowledge you obtained in "How to Read the Bible", identify the type or genre of literature the book is. For example, Colossians is didactic or teaching literature. Look for the author's reason for writing the book. In Colossians, Paul's reason for writing the book is in Col 2:8

Step 2 – find out any background information on the book that you can. In Colossians, the believers were dealing with people who wanted to fit Jesus into their own religions. So, Paul stresses the uniqueness of Jesus.

Step 3 – if it's a small book, re-read it several times all the way thru in one setting. This will give you a much better understanding of the flow of what Paul was trying to tell the Colossians. If it's a larger book, like Romans or Corinthians, break it up into smaller sections and re-read those several times.

Step 4 – outline the book or section if you can. Most study bibles have the book's outline at the very beginning of the book. Please note that there can be several outlines for one book of the bible, while still talking about the same theme. Outlines are not "inspired by God". One good resource is "The Outline Bible", by Harold Willmington. You can also use www.ccel.org/exec/outlines.colo.htm. Also use truthsaves.org, then click on 'outlines'. You may also want to read the bible book without any chapters and verses in it to get a better flow of the author's meaning. Go to raylcross.net/FlatBible/index.html.

Another way to do this is to break the book down into complete thoughts. Bibles usually do

this by starting new paragraphs. Here's an example of an outline of the book of Colossians:

COLOSSIANS: A Study and Teaching Outline	
Part One: Supremacy of Christ in the Church (1:1—2:23)	I. Introduction 1:1–14 A. Paul's Greeting to the Colossians 1:1–2 B. Paul's Thanksgiving for the Colossians 1:3–8 C. Paul's Prayer for the Colossians 1:9–14 II. The Preeminence of Christ 1:15–2:3 A. Christ Is Preeminent in Creation 1:15–18 B. Christ Is Preeminent in Redemption 1:19–23 C. Christ Is Preeminent in the Church 1:24–2:3 III. The Freedom in Christ 2:4–23 A. Freedom from Enticing Words 2:4–7 B. Freedom from Vain Philosophy 2:8–10 C. Freedom from Human Judgment 2:11–17 D. Freedom from Improper Worship 2:18–19 E. Freedom from Human Doctrine 2:20–23
Part Two: Submission to Christ in the Church (3:1—4:18)	I. The Position of the Believer 3:1–4 II. The Practice of the Believer 3:5–4:6 A. Put Off the Old Nature 3:5–11 B. Put On the New Nature 3:12–17 C. Personal Commands for Holiness 3:18–4:6 1. Holiness in Family Life 3:18–21 2. Holiness in Work Life 3:22–4:1 3. Holiness in Public Life 4:2–6 III. Conclusion 4:7–18 A. Commendation of Tychicus 4:7–9 B. Greetings from Paul's Friends 4:10–14 C. Various Matters Regarding the Epistle 4:15–18

Step 5 – What's the main point of the story or paragraph? In Matthew 9:1-8, Jesus heals a paralyzed man. He also says He's God, as only God can forgive sins.

Step 6 – how is it linked to the previous and the next paragraph? Or does the next paragraph start a new thought?

A) Why does Matthew 9:9-13 insert this story in the middle of physical healing stories, especially since He dealt with several apostles callings earlier? Because this was a social healing. Jewish taxmen were social outcasts. This is not just a disciple getting his calling from Jesus. Jesus is calling everyone to Him, even the outcasts.

B) Why does Matthew insert Matthew 8:18-22 in the middle of healing stories? Matthew 8:1 says large crowds followed Him after His teachings in chapters 5-7 (the Sermon on the Mount). He started healing people. It is natural after a great teaching and a supernatural display of power that people would be excited about following Him. He reminded them that it wasn't all power and glory. That following Him would cost them, that it would disrupt their life, that it should be the most important thing in their life (even more important than their family). Why does Matthew place much more emphasis on following Jesus and its cost than the other apostles? Matthew is writing to a mostly Jewish audience (as his gospel has more fulfilled Messianic prophecies than the other 3) and since the Jews rejected Him, Jewish believers would be more prone to pressures not to follow Him. This is why Matthew is warning people that there is a cost to follow Jesus.

C) Matthew 9:27-34 is a healing paragraph. Matthew 9:35-10:42 is a new thought which stresses evangelism. So, Verses 9:27-34 isn't directly related to Verses 9:35-10:42.

D) Mark 6:11, "And if any place will not welcome you or listen to you, leave that place and

shake the dust off your feet as a testimony against them.”

Most people think this only means that is someone doesn't accept what you say, to just leave them. It's their problem. You've done your duty.

But it's a lot more than that. In the 1st century, when pious Jews passed thru Gentile territory, they would shake the dust off of their feet to show their distaste for the Gentile practices. But the disciples were witnessing in Jewish towns. Jesus makes it clear that the Jews who reject His message were no better in God's eyes than the Gentiles were in Jewish eyes. This was a real slap-in-the-face to these self-righteous Jews. After all, they considered themselves to be 'God's Chosen People'. In our world today, there are seemingly religious people, even many who call themselves Christians, who reject the message of the gospel. Some even accuse us believers of perverting the message. They, not us, are responsible for what they do with the gospel message, as long as we have faithfully presented it. We shouldn't let their reaction stop us from evangelizing.

There is an indirect relationship in that after a display of power comes a call to follow Him (evangelism).

Step 7 – The Three Step Interpretive Method:

1...Original meaning – this helps you to understand a passage in its first century context.

What did it mean to the people who originally heard it? That is what our class, “How to Read the Bible” is all about. It's how to understand a passage in its historical, literary and cultural context.

2...Bridging the gap – this focuses on timeless principles while recognizing that there are things that are different between the 1st century and the 21st century.

3...21st Century Significance – how to take the truths you learned about in the 1st century and apply them in the 21st century. How do the truths spoken in a past time and a different culture apply to our similar yet different culture of today? In Colossians, verses such as C2V4 & 8, C2V6, C3V8-10, C3V15-17 & 23-24 and C4V5-6 are important verses. Put some of these verses on a 3x5 card. Put it in your pocket. Pull it out during the day and meditate on it, asking God how this applies to your life.

An example of Step 7, numbers 1-3 is of Colossians 2:6-15:

#1, the original meaning – the Colossian believers were experiencing influence from competing ideologies (verse 8). Paul reminds them that those ideologies will always redefine Christ and what He does for us. So Paul reminds them who Christ is and what He's done for us (verses 9-15).

#2, bridging the gap – people in the ancient world worried about the spirit world ruling over them. So, they resorted to magic to turn this to their advantage (Acts 19:19). Magic or false gods became rivals to Christ (Galatians 4:3, 8).

#3, 21st century significance – every generation of Christians have faced these threats. In today's world, there are many such threats that draw us away from dependency on Christ. Today, we still have magic (astrologers, mediums, tarot cards, etc.) but we also have our knowledge-based systems. Some scientists are trying to convince us that we are products of chemistry and/or biology that controls us. Everything from sexual orientation to addictions is understood as a matter of genetic destiny rather than our choice. If this knowledge leads us to believe that we cannot help ourselves, we're less likely to depend on Christ to help us battle these destructive behaviors. There's also many more, easier ways to indulge some of our sinful tendencies than before. Ways like becoming rich, pornography, gambling, etc. Or ways like seeking systems that promise us fulfillment like communism or socialism.

We see these “elemental spirits” at work today to sideline us from becoming the person God meant us to be. Verses 9-15 remind us that Christ has set us free from these principles (worldly visions of what gives us freedom) and principalities (other ungodly spiritual forces). Christ can and will direct us to live successfully in our 21st century based on how He has made us and with what spiritual gifts He has given us. Our dependence needs to be on Him.

Commentaries can also be useful in studying the bible. Here are some free commentaries:

- 1) www.studylight.org/commentaries These are older commentaries. For newer ones, you'd have to buy them or take them out from a library.
- 2) www.biblegateway.com/resources/commentaries You can check out the few commentaries they have listed or you can click on the Bible Book list. Then click on the desired book of the bible you want and the chapter, then click on the blue Study This icon. Then scroll down to study bibles, commentaries, dictionaries or encyclopedias. Please note that you have to buy some of these (they are marked with a \$ sign).
- 3) For a very good laymen's commentary, go to <http://www.biblestudyemail.com/index.php>

Further bible study methods and aspects:

English Word/Phrase study:

A. Look the word/phrase in a concordance.

B. How does the author use the word? Does it have a general or specific meaning?

C. What actions or consequences accompany this word?

D. Example...”filled with the Spirit”.

1. go to www.biblegateway.com

2. under the Search bar, type in “filled with the Spirit”
3. under the bible translation, click on “New International Version”
4. under Bible Book, click on Luke
5. click on “Search”. On the right hand side, click on “Luke” and it will list all the verses. In your bible, read the paragraphs around these verses. Then do III B & C above.
6. go back to #4, click on Acts and do #5 above.
 - a. Luke 1:15-17 41-45 & 67 Acts 2:4-14 4:8,31 9:17-20 13:9-12
 - b. Luke 1:15-17 what did John the Baptist and Elijah do? They proclaimed/prophesied.
 - c. Luke 1:41-45 what did Elizabeth do? She proclaimed/prophesied
 - d. Luke 1:67 what did Zechariah do? He proclaimed/prophesied
 - e. Acts 2:4-14 what did Peter do? He proclaimed
 - f. Acts 4:8 what did Peter do? He proclaimed
 - g. Acts 4:31 what did they do? They proclaimed
 - h. Acts 9:17-20 what did Paul do? He proclaimed
 - i. Acts 13: 9-12 what did Paul do? He prophesied

E. While “filled” is a general term, “filled with the Holy Spirit” has a very specific meaning for Luke.

F. When Luke uses this phrase, it is always accompanied by a proclamation/prophesy.

1. In Luke, “filled with the Holy Spirit” only applies to John the Baptist and his dad Zechariah and mother, Elizabeth.
2. In Acts, “filled with the Holy Spirit” applies to all believers, even Gentiles.

Other structural aspects of bible study:

Chiasm – a symmetrical word arrangement of an idea.

1...Psalm 19:1

- a) the heavens
- b) declare
- c) the glory of God
- a') the skies