

A STARTER'S GUIDE TO READING THE BIBLE - CHEAT SHEET

Where to Begin?

Many of us love the idea of Bible study, but struggle knowing where to begin. I want to offer some suggestions that I have found to be of great benefit. My hope is that these will serve you in your lifelong pursuit of knowing Christ better through the study of his Word.

Before You Study:

Pick a trustworthy English translation, such as the New International (NIV),ESV, or NASB.

Select a book of the Bible to study. If you are new to Bible study, I suggest you begin with a shorter epistle, such as 1 John or Colossians. If you are a new believer, begin with one of the Gospels, such as the Gospel of John or the Gospel of Mark, to learn about the life of Jesus.

Set apart a journal/notebook for your study. You may want to print out the book of the Bible you are studying, and put it into a binder if you prefer to mark up the pages.

Choose a consistent time, if possible, to develop the regular habit of spending time with Jesus.

Remember, every time you open the Word to do Bible study you are encountering the living God! Therefore, always pray before beginning and ask the Holy Spirit to speak powerfully to you through God's Word.

As You Study:

Get an overall "feel" for the book you are studying.

- Read straight through the book (in one sitting if possible).
- Read through the same book in another translation.
- Determine the literary genre(s) of the book.
- Find out where the book fits into the overarching storyline of Scripture.

Determine the "who, what, where, when, and why" of the book. In the beginning, a study Bible that has an overview of the book will be useful for getting this information. (Note: You may not be able to answer every question as some ancient dates and locations remain uncertain.)

- Who wrote the book and to whom was it written?
- What is the general theme of the book?
- Where did it take place (the location of the author, audience, and events)?
- When did it take place (the date of events and date of composition)?
- Why was it written (i.e., what's the purpose of the book)?

Start working your way through the book one passage at a time

- Break the book into "bite size" pieces. It's helpful to follow the natural breaks within the text itself as you study a couple of verses or passages (depending on the book and its genre) every day.
- Use the Bible study method provided to study your passage each day.

A STARTER'S GUIDE TO BIBLE READING METHOD

STEP 1. OBSERVE

Read Text: Read through your passage at least 2-3 times. You may want to read it in a different translation to see some of the nuances from the original languages.

Make Observations: Take time to slow down and observe the content in the text.

- Consider the content in the passage. Are there any key words? Repeated phrases or ideas? Purpose statements? Cause and effect relationships? Main characters? Important conjunctions? Metaphors? Comparisons/contrasts? A particular tone and mood?
- Notice the structure (the flow) of the text. How has the author organized the passage?
- Write down (or mark up on your printed pages) everything you observe about the text and any questions you have.

STEP 2. INTERPRET

Consider Context: Think about how the context impacts the main idea(s) being communicated in and through the text. The goal is to find the author's intended meaning.

- *The Literary Context*—What kind of writing is this? How does its genre impact meaning?
- *The Historical Context*—What is the particular historical and cultural setting to which the author is writing? What are the circumstances under which the book was written? (It's helpful to refer back to the Who, What, Where, When, Why.)
- *The Immediate Context*—What happened immediately before and after your passage? What is the relationship of your passage to the surrounding sentences and paragraphs?
- *The Redemptive-Historical Context*—Where does your passage fit into the whole storyline of Scripture? How does this passage relate to Jesus?

Write Summary: Taking the *content* and *the context* into account, write a summary sentence (or a couple sentences) that conveys the main idea(s) of the passage.

STEP 3. APPLY

Consider Implications: Are there any principles in the passage that are true *for all of God's people, in all places, at all times*? Look for these "timeless truths" as you do application.

Apply Text: Apply the main idea(s) of the text to your life. This involves *being, thinking, and doing*. It's a whole-person process. Encountering the living God should transform you!

- What does this passage teach you about God and his salvation in Christ? How should that affect your whole person—who you are, how you think, what you do, the manner in which you speak, the things you desire, your inner motivations, etc.?
- Are there any direct statements in this passage (such as commands, encouragements, challenges, or affirmations) that speak to you where you are right now?
- How does the meaning of the text apply to different "spheres" of your life—your life, your family and friends' lives, your church, your community, your city, and your world?
- How will you respond to God's Word today? Be incredibly specific and personal!

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