

# TOOLS FOR STUDYING THE BIBLE

*This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success.* **Joshua 1:8**

## STARTING

Before you get started, think through the following:

- *When will you read? Do you have a consistent time?*
- *Where will you read? Do you have a consistent place?*
- *What will you read? Do you have a plan?*
- *What do you need? Do you have a Bible, journal, pen and highlighter?*

## PRAYER

You should always approach the Scriptures in a posture of prayerful humility and longing. Ask God to:

- *Incline you entirely to His Word.*
- *Open your eyes to see the beautiful wonders of Christ and the glories of the gospel.*
- *Unite your heart to fear His name, knowing that your desires are ever divided.*
- *Satisfy you with His steadfast and unfailing love.*

## READING

The first step of study is to simply read the passage a few times to get an idea

of the content, context and flow. Highlight particular sections that stand out so that you can come back to them later.

## OBSERVATION

*What do you see?*

Observation lays the groundwork for all subsequent study. Cutting corners in this step can cause the entire process to unravel.

What are you observing? Everything. Your goal is not to determine what is and is not significant. Everything is significant. Observation is kind of like panning for gold. Your goal is to dig up as much as possible and allow the later processes to sift the gold.

1. Mark up the passage. Don't be afraid to write in your Bible. Circle, underline and highlight. Write in the margins. Get creative.
2. List 2-3 overarching themes you see in the passage.
3. List at least two observations per verse. The more the merrier.
4. Write down questions to think through in the step of interpretation.

## INTERPRETATION

*What does it mean?*

Your observations will most likely lead to interesting and challenging questions about the text. The step of interpretation allows you to sift through the various observations in order to provide answers.

## Who is...

- ...the author?
- ...the audience?
- ...being discussed?
- ...accomplishing the action?

## Where is...

- ...the author?
- ...the audience?
- ...the action taking place?

## What is the...

- ...meaning of this word?
- ...significance of this phrase?
- ...implication of this statement?
- ...overarching theme?

## Why did the author...

- ...choose this word?
- ...include this phrase?
- ...use this command?
- ...connect these ideas?
- ...not say \_\_\_\_?

1. Consider the context.
2. Compare multiple translations (ESV, NASB, NIV, HCSB).
3. Look up key words.
4. Check out cross-references to see how this passage relates to others.
5. When stumped, list out all the various options and pros and cons of each. After due consideration, use supplemental resources such as the ESV Study Bible or commentaries for helpful insights and background information.
6. Don't stop until you have considered how this passage fits into the overarching redemptive plan of God – the gospel. How does this passage relate to the person and work of Christ?
7. Make sure to discuss insights and questions with your spouse and gospel-centered community.

## APPLICATION

*What do I do with it?*

Bible study is incomplete until you have thought through how to apply the particular passage to your life. Some passages will be more readily applicable than others, but all Scripture is useful and helpful (2 Tim. 3:16-17).

1. List out a number of potential applications. To get started, here are a few questions to consider:
  - Is there an example for you to follow?
  - Is there a sin to repent of and/or avoid?
  - Is there a promise to trust?
  - Is there a prayer to repeat?
  - Is there a command to obey?
  - Is there a condition to meet?
  - Is there a verse to memorize?
  - Is there an erroneous view exposed?
  - What else is the Lord pressing upon you?
2. Choose one or two particular applications and prayerfully consider how you might pursue greater faithfulness in them. Be specific about what you will do (or not do) and whom you will ask (in addition to the Lord) to help you.

## RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

- *Living by the Book* by Howard Hendricks