



Studying the Bible

Studying the Bible is not rocket science. One need not have a degree to be able to open a Bible and understand what God is communicating to us.

However, just like in any endeavor, one can approach reading the Bible in a sloppy, haphazard way which opens up the strong possibility of misunderstanding. And we certainly don't want to misunderstand when God speaks.

If you think about it, wars have been fought; people have been murdered; genocide, slavery and oppression along with racism and sexism have occurred; families have been torn apart; and churches split—all because people have failed to understand what the Bible actually says...and do it.

So how can we avoid falling into the same trap as many who have gone before us? I believe it is by prayerfully, carefully and diligently becoming a Bible detective—or Bible sleuth.

BECOME A BIBLE SLEUTH



In order to be an effective Bible Sleuth, we need to have a proper method in order to gain proper insight. Just as a mystery sleuth would want to gather all of the clues and facts before drawing a conclusion, so should we when determining what God intends for us from His Word.

In a murder mystery, there may be the possibility of many different conclusions as to Who dunnit? But there is only one true and accurate account as to what actually happened. Some clues may point to one conclusion and other clues may point to a different conclusion. But ultimately there is only one correct interpretation of all of the clues.

This is the same with the Bible.*

It is our job to do the best we can, to gather the facts, and to determine the correct interpretation of a passage of Scripture.

The Apostle Paul encouraged a young Timothy to be diligent (work hard) and **rightly divide the Word of truth.** (2 Tim. 2:15) We, too, could take this to heart and work hard to cut to the truth of God's Word.

Paul also assured the Corinthians that he did not handle “**the word of God deceitfully,**” as many had done and *have* done over the centuries; but he was careful to make known the truth. (2 Cor. 4:2)

The Apostle Peter warned that some people who are not well trained and who can be easily persuaded sometimes twist Scripture to their own loss and harm. (2 Peter 3:16)

We want to be careful and diligent to not fall into these snares, but to study God's Word in such a way that we have the best likelihood of coming away with the truth. Of course, we are all fallible. But that does not mean that we throw in the towel and give up being responsible as we study the Bible.

We want to be careful and diligent to study God's Word in such a way that we have the best likelihood of coming away with the truth.

What it means is that we humbly come to God's Word, praying that the Holy Spirit will guide us, and use the gifts that God has given us to rightly divide His Word.

A SUGGESTED METHOD

This Session, we will be utilizing a very simple but effective method of Bible study which includes three (3) main parts:

1. **OBSERVATION:** This asks and answers the question, “What do I see?” It is the “who, what, when where, why and how” kind of questions.

2. **INTERPRETATION:** This asks, “What does it mean?” Most people, to their detriment, tend to spend all of their time here. They not only miss out on the crucial step of OBSERVATION, but they also avoid the most important step, that of APPLICATION

3. **APPLICATION:** This asks and answers, “How does this apply to me and others?”

We put the time and energy into this kind of study and method, as the Apostle Peter tells us, so that we will grow. He says, “**as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby.**” (1 Peter 2:2)

**There is only one true and accurate interpretation of a passage of Scripture, but there can be many applications.*

Dr. Howard Hendricks, in his book *Living By The Book*, makes the point that this verse does not say “that you may know” but “that you may grow.” He explains, “Certainly you can’t grow without knowing. But you can know and not grow. The Bible was written not to satisfy your curiosity but to help you conform to Christ’s image. Not to make you a smarter sinner but to make you like the Savior. Not to fill your head with a collection of biblical facts but to transform your life.”

The Bible was written not to satisfy your curiosity, but to help you conform to Christ’s image.

The goal of our study is to allow God to transform us and other followers of Christ in the Capitol Community through His Word. And we want to use a method for arriving at the proper applications for our lives so that we grow in the way the Lord intends for us to grow.

APPLYING THE METHOD

OBSERVATION:

Take a passage of Scripture—maybe a chapter, or a story, or a paragraph or two of the same topic. Read through it several times. Read the sections before and after it.

***If something is true, it can withstand all the scrutiny in the world.**

Take notes. Jot down key words or phrases. Look for things emphasized maybe through repetition or through comparison and contrasts or through cause and effect.

Ask Who, What, When, Where, Why, How questions. Bombard the text with all of the questions you can think of.

Just as a mystery sleuth must guard against coming to a crime scene with preconceived notions of the event and guilt of anyone, so, too, we should come to a passage of Scripture with as few presuppositions as possible.

Many people skip the Observation phase of study because they think that they are pretty sure they know what a passage is saying already and they either don’t want to take the time to gather more information, or worse, deep down, they don’t want their presuppositions challenged.

As a Bible sleuth we need to gather all the clues we can. This means expending time and effort and asking the text a lot of questions.

Who is writing? Who is speaking? Who is listening? Who is watching? Who does this affect?

What nouns can I identify—people, places, things, sounds, smells, tastes? What is the most important term and/or concept of the passage? What are the main verbs and their tenses? What terms do you need to define better for yourself so that you can better understand the passage?

When was this written? When did the events occur? How do these events fit with other events—biblical and historical?

Where is this event taking place? What building? Town? Region? Country? From where was this passage written? Where will this passage be read? From where are the different characters going or coming?

Why is this passage in the Bible? Why is this event occurring? Or why was this letter or poem written? Why did the actors act and respond the way they did?

How does the event affect the figures involved? How did the event commence, payout and end? How do the words spoken affect each hearer—primary hearers and those standing nearby?

This is just a sample of the questions that you can ask. Ask all the questions you can. We should not be scared of what we may find if our goal is to find truth.*

Try to put yourself in the shoes of every character in the story—even characters that you might imagine would be there but are not explicitly stated to be there. By doing this, you get to see the “clues” from a variety of angles.

Go back to some of your other questions and ask them with these characters in mind. What would each person have seen, heard, tasted, smelled, felt?

INTERPRETATION:

Once you have gathered a good sampling of facts, then you can start the process of asking, What does all of this mean? Is there a principle to learn; a promise to claim, a command to obey; an aspect of God to worship? Are there cultural principles that are intended for a particular time and place but can inform on topics of our day? Or are there supra-cultural principles that are true no matter the time or place?

APPLICATION:

And finally, the most important aspect of Bible study—How should what you have learned be used to change your life and the lives of other. What does God want from you today? What have you learned that will help you conform more to the image of Jesus Christ?

SENATE STUDY-Tue, 7:30am: Sen. Hancock’s office
HOUSE STUDY-Wed, Lunch: Austin Club
CAPITOL COMMUNITY STUDY-Thu, Noon: Sam Houston Bldg
Rm 210

