

**HOW TO STUDY THE BIBLE**

The apostle Paul said to his son in the faith Timothy (**2 Tim. 2:15**): **Make every effort to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth.** Through our eager study of God's Word, we pray that the Holy Spirit will give us understanding as we do our thorough, diligent work.

**A. WHAT DOES IT SAY? or READ.** What did the original writer intend his original readers to *know*?

1. **Read the passage over many times**, using several translations, such as New American Standard, English Standard Version, New International, New King James, Phillips, Amplified Bible, New Living Bible, etc. Take the passage literally unless it's clear it's not. What are the customary meanings of the words being used?
2. **Be taking notes.** Writing down what we discover helps us think and remember. What are the main details that are standing out to you? Perhaps look for "ten observations and five questions."
3. **Sum up the essential message of each paragraph in one phrase** (15 words or less). Good summaries are brief and simple. If one knows the passage and receives our summary, he/she should know where that specific passage is.
4. **Rephrase each verse** in your own words. Say the same thing again, only using different words. Be constantly reworking your rephrases as you do further study.
5. **Pray back to God His message**, sharing with Him your discoveries and questions.

**B. WHAT DOES IT MEAN? or EXPLAIN.** What did the original writer intend his original readers to *understand*?

1. **Recreate the historical setting**, seeing the passage in its *historical* context, the *Bible* context, its *book* context, and its *immediate* context—writer and his circumstances, where written, readers, date, customs and culture of the people, reasons for writing. Use Ryrie Study Bible, MacArthur Study Bible, or NIV Study Bible, and Bible commentaries and dictionaries (Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible). These help us reconstruct the culture, the problems of the readers, and the political, social, and religious climates of the day.
2. **Do word studies**, and then plug them back into your rephrase. On the web, [www.Biblehub.com](http://www.Biblehub.com) ('lexicon') and [www.blueletterbible.org](http://www.blueletterbible.org) give some helpful word studies. Or, use the New American Standard (NAS) Bible; NAS Concordance (the tools are geared to Strong's numbers). Then use Vine's Expository Dictionary geared to Strong's numbers. Wuest's Word Studies in the Greek New Testament is excellent in NT word studies. For the OT, use the Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament by Harris, Archer, and Waltke.

3. **See what other reliable commentators say**. By this time, you should know the passage well enough to recognize the false when you read other helps. Use Wuest's Word Studies, Tyndale Commentaries, the two-volume Bible Knowledge Commentary, the MacArthur New Testament Commentaries, New Bible Commentary, the two-volume Expositor's Bible Commentary, Discovery Papers [www.pbc.org](http://www.pbc.org) and [www.pbcc.org](http://www.pbcc.org)); books by Ray Stedman [www.raystedman.org](http://www.raystedman.org), Charles Swindoll, John MacArthur, Martyn Lloyd-Jones, John R. W. Stott. [www.Biblehub.com](http://www.Biblehub.com) (under 'lexicon') provides helpful tools for grammar. *Be sure the Scripture text is your primary focus*, lining up each writer's comments with the Word. Write down ideas that are helpful in defining, explaining, and applying the passage.

**C. WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO ME? or APPLY.** What are some possible ways to personally apply this passage?

There should only be one explanation or interpretation of a passage but there may be many applications. What changes in understanding, attitude, action, or word does this passage require of us and our situations in life? The Bible deals in principles much of the time, and we as students are responsible to apply those Biblical principles to the specifics of life as we walk with God in the Word and in prayer. Also remember, only the Holy Spirit through us can live out these changes so they are pleasing to our Lord.

**D. WRITE A LETTER EXPLAINING THIS PASSAGE TO ANOTHER.**

Finally, imagine that you're *emailing or writing a letter to a friend* explaining the discoveries you have made and what the passage says and means and how it applies to your lives. Remember, the Bible is God's Word and will not contradict itself. If necessary, clear up problem areas with the clear teaching of other passages relating to the same subject. Otherwise, *stick with the one passage*. We want our friend to understand this passage, not a general subject. God's Word is the message!

Go through the How to Study the Bible handout, using **2 Tim. 3:16-4:2**.

Then go through the example of writing a letter based on **Mk. 4:35-41**.

Then go through the example of writing a commentary based on **Mk. 4:35-41**. Besides **Mk. 4:35-41**, four other great Bible passages for study are **Eph. 6:11-18** (make sure you memorize each piece of armor and how to practically use it), **Rom. 6:1-14**, **2 Cor. 4:7-11**, and **1 Pet. 2:21-25**.

Now let's practice How to Study the Bible! The apostle Paul writes to Timothy in **2 Tim. 2:15**: **Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth.** When we handle accurately God's word of truth, we'll be approved to God; we won't be ashamed. Let's use **2 Tim. 3:16-17** and the two-page handout on "How to Study the Bible" as our basis for our learning.

Please read and thoughtfully meditate on **2 Tim. 3:16-17**. The first thing you look for as you study the Bible is WHAT DOES IT SAY? WHAT DID THE ORIGINAL WRITER INTEND HIS ORIGINAL READERS TO *KNOW*? To arrive at this:

**First, read** the passage over many times, using several translations, letting the passage get a grip on you.

**Second, take notes.** Write down main details, questions, observations, the flow of the passage.

**Third, summarize** each paragraph in fifteen words or less. It should include the main idea of each paragraph. God's breathed-out words are profitable in four ways; they result in being adequate, prepared perfectly.

**Fourth,** an essential ingredient is to **rephrase** each verse in your own words. When rephrasing, you express the same truth only using different words. As you continue your study, you'll be constantly reworking your rephrases. All Scripture is God-breathed and useful for instruction, revealing what is wrong, showing how to correct, and training in right living, SO THAT the person of God may be sufficient, complete, prepared perfectly for every good work.

**Fifth, pray** back to God His message in this passage. What are you learning? Share it with our Lord. "Father, Your Word is profitable and able to make me adequate, equipped for every good work. You through Your word deal with every area of my life. May I comprehend what the original writer intended his original readers to *know* and *understand*, and then may I understand how to *apply* this passage to myself and *share* these truths with others."

The second thing you look for as you study the Bible is WHAT DOES IT MEAN? WHAT DID THE ORIGINAL WRITER INTEND HIS ORIGINAL READERS TO *UNDERSTAND*? To arrive at this understanding:

**First, recreate the historical setting, establishing the contexts.** Context, context, context! There's no way to stress how important setting the contexts is!! It prevents many wrong 'interpretations'. When discovering what a passage 'means', we shouldn't end up with a lot of different interpretations. We may end up with a lot of different applications, but there should basically be only one interpretation of a passage. There are four contexts to establish: (1) Historical context—the date, what was happening in the world at that time, what was happening to the readers. The date of 2 Timothy was around the mid-60s A.D. Nero was the Roman emperor, and he was blaming and persecuting Christians for the wrong going on in his empire.

(2) The Bible context—where does this particular book fit in the Bible? 2 Timothy is in the New Testament, and it is one of the last books written. (Hebrews & John's Gospel & Revelation & 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> John were written later).

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(3) The book context—what is an outline of the book, and where does the passage I'm studying fit in that book? Paul was writing to his child in the faith Timothy, who was working with the Ephesian church. Paul was writing because he was lonely, because he was concerned about the persecuted churches, and because Timothy needed encouragement.

(4) The immediate context—what information is in the two or three paragraphs that come before **2 Tim. 3:16-17** and what comes immediately after? Paul was warning Timothy about the last days (3:1-9), and sharing with him how to deal with last days (3:10-4:5).

**Second, do word studies, and then plug them back into your rephrases.**

On the web, there is a site that I use: [www.Biblehub.com](http://www.Biblehub.com). 'Inspired by God' means God-breathed. 'Correction' means setting straight again, restore. 'Adequate' means fitted, ready, completed, prepared. 'Equipped' means furnished completely, finished, accomplished, equipped fully. 'Good' means useful, excellent, inherently good, good in nature.

**Third, see what other reliable commentators say.** After going through the initial steps, you should now know the passage well enough to *recognize the false and the helpful* when you read or hear other teachers. Remember to keep your finger on the text of Scripture while learning from others and writing down thoughts that are helpful in defining, explaining, & applying the passage.

The third thing you look for as you study the Bible is WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO ME? WHAT ARE SOME PERSONAL WAYS TO APPLY THIS PASSAGE? To make the passage your own, think through the following:

There can be, should be, many applications of a passage. Let the passage teach, reprove, correct, and/or train you in God's just ways. Let God's truth point out what needs to be dealt with, and how to Biblically correct the issue. What changes in understanding, attitude, choice, action, or speech does this passage address? Keep in mind while applying: only the indwelling, enabling, strengthening Holy Spirit can truly live out these changes in and through us.

As I meditate on these verses, I realize that only the Scriptures are breathed-out by God. That means His Word is the authority in my entire life. I want to make decisions that line up with the plumb-line of His written words. God's words accurately: (1) instruct me; (2) show me where I'm wrong in my words or behavior, my thinking, my choices, my motivation, or who I'm relying on; (3) reveal to me how to correct or make straight or restore whatever I'm dealing with; and, (4) train or discipline me in God's right ways. The end result is that I'm fitted out or ready, equipped and furnished completely for God's useful, excellent work. All this means is that I must spend much time of solitude with God in His Word and thoughtfully, meditatively, consider what it says, means, and how to use it in everyday life. It will be transforming!

The last thing you want to do as you finish your study is to WRITE A LETTER, EXPLAINING AND APPLYING THIS PASSAGE. A very practical way to help you know if you understand what the passage says and means and how you can use it in everyday life is to put down on paper your understanding and explanation. Imagine that a friend has a problem that is addressed by the passage you're studying. Share with him/her the truths of **2 Tim. 3:16-17**.

Here's an example: As the apostle Paul neared the end of his earthly life, he reminded Timothy of the vital importance of God's words. Please read **2 Tim. 3:16-17**. Timothy was a man of the Word, beginning as a child to know, understand, and apply the Scriptures. "Timothy and (your friend's name), *All Scripture is God-breathed. It's profitable in four ways. It results in a Christian being adequate, equipped for every good work.*" Wow! **:16 (read)** Breathed out by God—it's as though He breathed out His words, and they landed on the written page. Although He used human writers, this is GOD speaking with us! What we have is inspired by Him, no one else. This means God chose even the very words to communicate to us. In the Bible we have the mind of God in written form. Scripture is the accurate recording of God's thoughts and words that He wanted us to know, believe, and apply. Since these are His words, His very words, to you and me, then it has authority, His authority. *Whatever truth is needed is provided by God Himself in His breathed-out words.*

And it's useful, beneficial. God uses it in various ways. His breathed-out words don't just give *information* but *practical wisdom*, wisdom that will change our lives. The Scripture instructs, shows what is wrong, shows how to correct, and disciplines in God's right ways. Teaching, instruction, means to give knowledge of God and His ways in an understandable way. Reproof is a rebuke which carries conviction of sin along with it. Reproof shows what is wrong in lives, whether it's in the area of the heart, thinking, choices, behavior, or speech. Correction (literally to make straight; a tent-making term) means to show us how to correct what is wrong. It corrects false beliefs we may hold or wrong behavior we may be practicing or wrong choices we may be making. Training in righteousness means to be disciplined, brought up, in God's right ways. We are trained in GOD's way of thinking and living. It trains us in how to live God's holy ways both inwardly and outwardly. Again, wow! So, this means that every time we're in God's Scripture, it should teach, reprove, correct, and/or train us. We should go away from such interaction with God and His truth that our thinking, choices, behavior, and speech are changed, really changed! (Your friend's name), we want our minds renewed, so we see all from God's perspective. Please! Stop and think about what's been said so far!!

**:17 (read)** When God's breathed-out Scriptures are used as He intends, the end result is a disciple who is adequate, complete, sufficient, able to meet the demands. Equipped means finished, prepared perfectly, furnished completely. *This kind of maturity is available for any person who has come to salvation through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. It's available for you!! (Your friend's name), please make the connection between God's truth and your life! God's truth is meant to be applied, used! When we know and apply God's truth, it will continually be changing our outlooks on life, the choices we make, and the way we live. The resource is the Word of God; the result is change in the person of God.*

God's Word will also help us minister in a profitable way with others. This means when serving others, make sure it's God's inspired Scripture that we're sharing. Paul says to Timothy in **4:1-2**, **"I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus...PREACH THE WORD; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction."** **1 Pet. 4:11a** backs up this same thought.

We must let God's Word do its penetrating, teaching, reproving, correcting, training-in-righteousness work, then by absolute confidence in our great God, let's act upon what He's revealed. *God's breathed-out words are indispensable in becoming a mature man/woman of God.* Let Jesus and the words of God show you how to enter His rest and walk in faithful obedience. Commit to Bible study, a process of memorization, meditating upon God's truths, letting God's Word do its penetrating work in you. The end result is maturity, fully prepared to do the work to which God has called you, and from **Heb. 4:11-13**, a person who is resting from his/her own works and resting totally in Jesus.

Let's conclude by reading **Ps. 119:97-104**. What great verses!!

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Here's another example of a letter based on what was uncovered in Bible study.

Dear fellow believers,

Storms, they come, don't they? Being a Christian does not exempt us from these powerful circumstances that sometimes hit when we least expect them, especially when we're being obedient! What is it for you? **What makes you timid, cowardly, forgetting all the lessons you've heard?** I find this most often takes place in my life when I can't plan the situation ahead of time or when things don't go as I had planned. A while back, when I went through some unsolicited criticism, I tended to panic because I didn't know what to 'do', how to 'prepare' so it wouldn't take place again. One passage that was helpful for me was in **Mark 4:35-41 (read)**. This gospel was written by a man named Mark, who probably got most of his information from Peter the apostle. Probably writing in the late 40s or early 50s A.D., Mark wrote this primarily for non-Jewish readers. Mark's main thrust is to present Jesus as a servant and as a ransom; the key verse is **Mark 10:45 (read)**.

The day of this passage, Jesus had given *and then explained* to His disciples several parables. Maybe we should learn that storms are often testing grounds for truth heard and often God has prepared us ahead of time for them.

Let's look at **:35-36 (read)**. That day had been long and exhausting for Jesus—if we put the whole day together it seems that Jesus had been in a house, dealing with His misunderstanding family and with vindictive scribes; then by the sea, teaching parables to a sensation-seeking crowd and to His followers who wanted to understand and grow. So, when evening came, Jesus was drained. When evening came, Jesus said to His disciples, "Let's head for the other side of the Sea of Galilee." And in a large fishing boat, they headed out. Other smaller rowboats were following. Notice, they took Him. Also notice, they were being 100% obedient when the storm struck!

**:37-39 (read)** While crossing, at night, a fierce gale of wind came up, the waves were breaking over the boat, the boat was filling fast (or sinking fast)! Furious gusts, sheets of rain, the waves were throwing themselves into the boat, and repeatedly doing so. Around the Sea of Galilee, hot air draws storms down with sudden power from the surrounding mountains. This was definitely a real threat to their lives! Where's Jesus? He's asleep, on a cushion, in the back of the ship. His need for sleep shows His true and real humanity.

These experienced fishermen were scared, stiff, and so they woke Jesus. "Teacher, don't You care that we are perishing?" **Mt. 8:25** says, "Lord, save us! We're going to drown!" Obviously this was not an act of faith. These men expected to die. "Teacher, don't You care!" Notice, it's the disciples' idea that they're perishing, not the Lord's! Where's the day's learning from the Sunday morning message? Gone, forgotten in the presence of the storm.

In **:39** Jesus arose, rebuked the wind, and said to the water, "Hush, be still. Be muzzled and stay that way; be being calmed." And what had been a threat to their very lives was suddenly strangely quiet. Can't you picture these men

standing there, dripping wet, bailing buckets in hand, standing in a calm boat on a calm sea!

**:40 (read)** "Why are you so timid, cowardly; where is your faith?" Jesus never reproved for questions or mistakes, but He did for lack of faith when it could and should have been present. When we study the Word or hear the Word explained, what do we do with the information, use it or lose it (4:25)? The disciples had a basis from the teaching throughout the day on which to exercise Biblical faith. They chose not to believe and act on those facts. What was Jesus teaching them and us? (1) Faith in God is the only answer to fear of circumstances because He has the authority (and wisdom) to do whatever is best. (2) No storm can wreck the program of God.

**:41 (read)** After the calming and His words, then the disciples in **:41** were really afraid: "They feared a great fear!"—dread, terror, seized with alarm—caused not by the storm but by the man! "Who is this man? We must find out. He's greater than we thought." The rush of the wind and the beating of the waves didn't awaken Him, but the cry of men in trouble did. Who is this? In the answer to that question is the secret of rest. This passage makes clear that if Jesus is present, all is well, even if a storm is raging. An old-timer named Jeremy Taylor wrote, "We are far safer in the middle of a storm with God, than anywhere else without Him." Two chapters later (chapter 6) the disciples would face another one. There will always be storms—how will we respond? Let God take us through the storm. Be a person of faith. Learn when you can so you'll not panic in the storm. "It's not the miracles that will make you believe or convince you; it's the Word that I speak that you can base your faith on." Two other thoughts: (1) the rowboats: Jesus' act of mercy was on a wider scale than just the Twelve. (2) even when fear came, Jesus didn't let them utterly collapse; He responded even though they had no faith!

What can we learn from these verses? First, not to put demands on God that He take out all the storms of life; they seem to be necessary, both to reveal us and to grow us. Second, it would be great if God would hush the storms we're in at the moment, but apparently there are greater things, such as watching Him through the storm! Third, we can expect the Lord to make a storm a laboratory in our lives to see how well we have understood His Word planted. Fourth, we can learn that obedience doesn't promise freedom from fear if we aren't basing our faith upon His words. "Lord, I trust that this 'storm' is for my best, part of Your growth process for me, and out of Your love."

When going through those months of disapproval, I finally got my eyes fixed on the Lord alone, and there (in Him) I found rest, peace, patience, love—even though the disapproval went on for quite some time. I found in our Lord enough, more than enough!

Christian friends, my prayer for all of us is that Jesus won't have to say to us **:40!** May we be known as 'trusting' believers! May we be aware of those opportunities our Lord gives us to trust Him.

In our caring Lord's Name, Joel