

BASIC BIBLE STUDY METHODS

Why should Christians study the Bible? The answer is simple: because the Bible is God's Word. The Eternal God—in his infinite wisdom—has chosen to reveal himself to his creatures in the words of a book, namely, the Bible. To put it simply, when we read the Scriptures, we hear the very words of our God. This means that the importance of the Bible cannot be overstated.

In his Word, God has not only revealed himself to us, but has shown us his master plan to display his glory through the redemption of a people and the restoration of creation. This plan was set in motion before the world began, and came to a climax at the cross, where Jesus the Messiah died to save sinners and to defeat sin and death. He was raised from the grave three days later, and subsequently sent out the Holy Spirit to apply this work of restoration and renewal to all who would repent and believe. One day, says the Bible, the great Lord Jesus will return and set all things right, decisively defeating evil, rescuing his people, and ushering in the New Creation where those who are in Christ will dwell with him forever.

If you are a believer, this story that the Bible tells is also your story. In the Scriptures, we learn the truth about God, and about ourselves. In order to follow Jesus, we must know him and we must obey what he says. The only way to do that is through reading God's Word. "Simply put, we cannot truthfully say that we are followers of Jesus if we neglect or refuse to obey what the Bible tells us, or if we use it in self-serving ways that are not what God originally intended."¹

Because God's Word is so important, it is absolutely vital for our lives of faith that we learn to read it well. That is where "Bible Study Methods" come in. What follows is not an infallible guide to understanding every single verse in the Bible; these are guidelines, that, if used correctly, should lead a greater comprehension of God's revelation in the Scriptures. A solid method for studying the Bible keeps us from imposing our own ideas onto the text, and instead, we will work to see what God, as the ultimate author who is speaking through human authors, is communicating to us. The author of any writing has a specific message that they are seeking to communicate to the reader. The author, therefore, determines the meaning of the text, not the reader. The goal of the reader is to identify and understand that intended meaning. When it comes to the Bible, these intended meanings are absolutely True. These Truths are from God to people—not just some people a really long time ago, but to all people of all times and all places. These Truths are eternal and never become irrelevant. The Bible is the absolute and ultimate Truth about all things.

Ultimately, God gave us the Scriptures so that we would know him. With true knowledge of God through the study of his Word comes a living, vibrant, ever growing relationship whereby we love him more and live more fully in him. Let us, then, endeavor to continually read God's Word, and seek to read it rightly.

THE FOUR STEPS OF BIBLE STUDY

In this study, we will be using a four-step approach to studying the Bible. Each of these steps address a particular question which is important to our understanding and use of the Bible.²

1. **Seeing** asks the question: What does it say?
-Helps us see what is and is not in the text.
2. **Understanding** asks the question: What does it mean?
-We must understand everything in context.
3. **Sharing** asks the question: What truths (or Shared Truths) is it teaching?
-Not what we want it to say, but what the author intended to communicate.
4. **Responding** asks the question: So what?
-How we are to respond to what the text means.

¹ Ray Lubeck, *Read the Bible for a Change*, p. 2.

² The vast majority of the following material has been adapted and revised from Ray Lubeck, *Bible Study Methods and ABSM Notes*, BIB 104/345 (Multnomah University, 2017); and Ray Lubeck, *Read the Bible for a Change: Understanding and Responding to God's Word* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2005), and is used with his permission. Please do not reproduce any of this material in any form without the prior consent of the Ray Lubeck.

STEP 1: SEEING

In reading the Bible, it is also important to know these three points: (1) Every piece of literature belongs to a particular *category*, and therefore has a particular form; (2) The *category* we think we are listening to affects the way we understand it; and (3) The Bible contains *many* different categories of writing, so we must properly recognize the form of each passage we read in order to understand it correctly.

Technically, the whole Bible belongs in a literary category all by itself: it is *revelation*, i.e., it announces a message from God to us, and it demands a personal response on our part. Within this “mega-category,” it is helpful to identify three additional *levels* of literary categories in the Bible.

1. Type: The first level is *type* of Biblical literature, of which there are three:

1.1 *Narrative*: a text that makes its primary point by telling a story. (44% of the Bible is narrative)

1.2 *Poetry*: a text where normal language is modified to intensify its impact. Various poetic devices are used that affect how sentences are structured, and there is usually a high concentration of figures of speech. (33% of the Bible is poetry)

1.3 *Discourse*: a text that systematically and logically presents an idea or series of ideas. (23% of the Bible is discourse)

2. Genre: The second level is *genre*, of which there are seven in the Bible. A genre is a recognizable category of writing which follows certain rules and patterns. There is not a direct relationship between types and genres. For example, the type of narrative may coincide with any of the seven different genres (the same is true for poetry and discourse).

2.1 *Apocalyptic*: A style of writing that is highly symbolic, concerning end-of-the-world events. Incorporates esoteric imagery, angelic messages, visions, mysterious numbers, and concerns the fate of people and the world (e.g., Rev, Dan 7-12, Zech).

2.2 *Epistle*: Letters written by leaders to churches or individuals, following a predictable pattern and format (e.g., Gal, Eph, 2 John).

2.3 *Gospel*: Tells the story of the earthly life and ministry of Jesus, his preaching, miracles, death, resurrection, etc. The gospel genre is concerned with the Good News of Jesus and his mission of salvation (e.g., Matt, Mark, Luke, John, parts of Acts).

2.4 *Prophecy*: Biblical prophecy is any writing in which the author speaks on behalf of God or delivers a message directly from God. Contrary to popular belief, it is most often *not* about the future. Instead, the genre of prophecy includes any time the author either directly says or implies, “Thus says the Lord...” (e.g., Isa, Joel, Zeph, etc.)

2.5 *Psalms*: Poetic songs found throughout the Bible, not just in the book of Psalms. They are always poetic, frequently are prayers to God, and they express praise, thanksgiving, and lament. (e.g., the book of Psalms, 1 Sam 2, 1 Chr 16)

2.6 *Story*: Record an event or series of events that have taken place. The features of a story overlap with narrative (e.g., Esther, Judges 5, Gal 1:13-2:21).

2.7 *Wisdom*: Offers insights on how to live, based on perspectives drawn from observable patterns in the world. Readers of wisdom literature discover insights, values, perspectives, and skills for godly success that emerge from the fear of the Lord. (e.g. Prov, Eccl, Job)

3. Form: The third level contains the *forms* of biblical literature. This level takes place within smaller sections of text, anywhere from a single phrase to a chapter or more. There are many of these, and the following list is not exhaustive.³

Announcement of Birth, Blessing, Chronicle, Covenant, Curse, Dialogue, Doxology, Exhortation, Farewell address, Genealogy, History, Hymn, Irony, Lament, List, Miracle, Oracle, Parable, Proverb, Quotation, Satire, Thanksgiving, Travel Log, Treaty, Woe

³ See the detailed list in Ray Lubeck, *Read the Bible for a Change*, 233-34.

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While this is a lot of information, I assure you, there is a point. It is extremely important to recognize the literary type of the passage you're reading so that you know what to be looking for. For each of the three major types, you will need to bring different "tools" to the job, as it were, because each type requires some adjustments in what you are looking for in the text.

A very helpful way to approach the Bible and the first step of Bible Study is to ask all the standard news reporter's questions. *The basic questions to ask yourself when reading any passage of Scripture are: Who? What? When? Where? and How?*

1. Who?

- Does it say who wrote the book? If so, under what conditions?
- To whom is the author speaking or writing?
- Who are the characters involved?
- Is the author quoting someone else?
- Is somebody or some group of people being described?

2. What?

- Is the passage about events (narrative) or ideas (discourse, poetry)?
- What key words or phrases can you identify?
- What key events take place? What conflicts are presented in the text?
- What is the author saying about each of the characters?
- What is the main idea being discussed? What is the author saying about the main idea?
- What is the overall plot?
- What other important themes are present?
- What literary style, genre(s), and/or forms does the author use?

3. When?

- Does the passage say when the book was written?
- Does it describe the circumstances of its writing?
- When does the action take place?
- Does the text refer to the past, present, or future?
- What words indicate time factors or time change? (e.g., "3 days," "then," "tomorrow," "before," etc.)

4. Where?

- Where was the author at the time of the writing of the book?
- Where do the initial readers of the book live?
- Where does the action of the story take place?
- What nations, regions, or cities are mentioned?
- What buildings, structures, or landmarks are referred to?
- Do these buildings/places have special theological significance (e.g., temple, wilderness, Babylon, Zion, etc.)?

5. How?

- How would you describe the tone of writing?
- How does the author portray each of the characters?
- How does his characterization contribute to the message he is trying to get across?
- How would you describe the pace of the story? (e.g., hurried, suspenseful, deliberate, jerky, etc.)
- How does the pace effect the story impact and meaning?
- What important words or phrases are repeated? Why?
- Are any motifs or type-scenes employed? (i.e., expressions or situations which are found elsewhere in the Bible—e.g., miraculous birth to a previously childless couple, storm at sea, thunder and earthquake on a mountain, etc.) If so, what is the significance of these parallels?
- What literary devices does the author use? (symbols, parallelism, conclusion, etc.)
- What kinds of literary relationships exist in the passage? (contrast, pivot, condition, result, etc.)
- What strategies does the author employ to convince or persuade you as the reader?
- What figures of speech are used? What is their effect?

Note: You *do not* have to ask every single one of these questions for every single passage you study. These are to provide some guidelines and suggestions for things to be looking for.

STEP 2: UNDERSTANDING

Understanding involves seeing the connections between the observations made through the questions asked in the first step. This step asks, “What does this passage mean?”

When it comes to interpreting the Bible, there is (almost) always *only one* correct meaning to any given passage of Scripture. *The correct meaning of the text is what the author intended to communicate. This is the only meaning; the meaning is not what the reader decides, it must be in line with the author’s original intent.* Given all the facts of the text that we can observe, we seek to understand what that message is. The interpretation that best lines up for all of the facts and observations within the text is what we would call our most probable interpretation.

Foundational Principles for Studying the Bible

The goal of interpreting the Bible is to discover the author’s intended meaning and goals as they are presented in the text. With the Bible, we do this so that we might become more like Christ. The following points are all important ground rules as we set out on the journey of interpretation.

1. *The Bible is authoritative*

-It is our standard for establishing both our doctrine and our behavior as Christians.

2. *It is possible for finite humans to understand the meaning of Scripture.*

-Understanding of the Bible doesn’t come automatically with simply reading it.

-God has made the meaning of the Bible accessible to anyone.

-It is the “revelation” of God, who wants us to know him. Thus the Bible is understandable and sufficiently clear (“perspicuous”).

-The message of the Bible can be properly identified in modern translations.

-It is the privilege and responsibility of every believer to read and interpret the Scriptures.

-The Spirit helps us understand the Bible

3. *Our understanding can increase, yet it will never be exhaustive.*

4. *There is normally only one correct meaning to any given passage of Scripture.*

5. *The correct meaning is what the author intended to communicate.*

-Various interpretations are simply hypotheses which attempt to account for what the author has said, and how and why he has said it in that way.

6. *Though every passage has just one meaning (the author’s), it has many applications.*

-There is an important difference between *meaning* (what we identify as Shared Truths) and *significance* (how it relates to specific needs and circumstances).

7. *Every passage of Scripture needs to be understood in light of its literary type and genre.*

-Each style and genre has its own set of “rules” and calls for a different set of interpretive strategies. Each form has a conventional pattern, and our awareness of them shapes what we are to look for.

8. *Scriptural passages are best understood when read in light of their context.*

-The Bible is a unified whole. There is continuity of character and a single, overarching plot. Thus, while there is great diversity within the Bible (of authorship, time periods, languages, literary styles, theological emphases, geographical locations, etc.), it is essentially one story.

-Accurate interpretation is based upon a thorough understanding of the entire context of a given passage. Context will determine the meaning of words and whether something is to be understood literally or figuratively.

-Our focus is the text itself, not books about the Bible, Bible characters, historical background, archaeology, etc.

-Each passage of Scripture is illuminated by other passages. Thus our interpretation of a particular passage should be compared with other Scriptures.

9. *Following the Bible means that we emphasize what the text emphasizes, not building main points from the details.*

-The authors of Scripture each wrote with specific purposes and used literary “strategies” to accomplish this. Looking for these larger structures of thought enables us to understand each part properly.

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-We should not approach individual verses as self-contained units. Every verse fits within the logical sequence of an entire passage, and must be understood in light of the whole.

-We must allow the passage to establish its own “agenda” of concerns. Biblical authors usually highlight their central idea through repetition, amount of space, chiasm, or some other literary device. We should therefore develop an eye for seeing these clues.

10. *We need to evaluate our personal experience in light of Scripture, and not the other way around.*

11. *We should check out our understanding of God’s Word with other believers.*

12. *Every passage of Scripture has meaning and relevance for the believer.*

-Some passages have more direct relevance while others have more indirect, but *all* Scripture is profitable for Christian growth (2 Tim 3:16-17).

Suggestions for Understanding

-Look at the collected data from Seeing.

-Which topics brought up by the author receive the most emphasis? Which topics take up the most space, have added illustrations, and/or are discussed without interruption?

-Is there a section of teaching before urging? What is the teaching? What is the urging?

-Identify what the author appears to be doing in each paragraph.

-Locate the logical connecting words (e.g. therefore, even though, so, if, just as, even as) to connect the themes in paragraphs or at an even larger scale.

-Does there appear to be a structure of any kind to the passage?

-Are other Biblical references (from OT or NT) being used that you need to read? What are they about?

Putting together these reading clues will best help us come to the meaning of the passage. But how do we know if we have identified the correct interpretation?

Testing Your Understanding

1. *Does this understanding arise naturally from the content of the passage under study?*

We must notice the details of the entire context and how well our interpretation explains and integrates all that we have seen. Be careful to avoid the pitfalls of: (1) Choosing to only use some of the text when coming up with your probable interpretation; and (2) Making an interpretation that depends on assumptions or information from outside of the text.

2. *Does this understanding smoothly “plug into” the flow of thought in the wider context?*

We understand the point of what a text is communicating in light of the texts that surround it. No biblical text is to be read in isolation. We must identify how our text fits into the passages before and after, and how it fits in to the larger narrative or letter, and even how it fits into the entire Bible.

3. *Does this understanding fit with the author’s overall literary strategy in communicating his message?*

4. *Is this understanding in harmony with the entire Scriptural teaching on this subject?*

The Bible has a coherent unity and wholeness and individual passages *always* fits within that wholeness. In this way, Scripture interprets itself and does not contradict itself. If our interpretation in any way conflicts with other Scripture we must return to the text for a revised understanding.

5. *Does this understanding find support from fellow believers?*

It is never good to be the only one holding to a certain interpretation of a passage. If you have some brand new, novel interpretation, never before held to by anyone in church history, you’re almost certainly wrong. God’s Word is the commonality of all believers. We have a higher probability of having a correct biblical interpretation when we study together, discussing God’s intended meaning. Here it can also be helpful to consult biblical resources, such as commentaries, Bible dictionaries, study Bibles, theological reference works, etc.

STEP 3: SHARING

This step focuses on the timeless truth—the main ideas—that the original author intends to share with his readers. It is called “sharing” because in this step, we are seeking to identify the “shared truth” of the Biblical text. *A Shared Truth is a truth claim that God is communicating (“sharing”) with all people of all time everywhere through a given passage of Scripture.* Notice three things about this definition:

1. A Shared Truth is **eternal**.

Example: “If you do not believe that I AM, you will indeed die in your sins.” (John 8:24)

-Poor statement: “When Jesus was on earth the Jews needed to believe in him.” *This speaks only to a past event and is not timeless.*

-Better statement: “Anyone who believes in Jesus does not die in sin. We should therefore actively respond to him and believe his claim to be God trusting in him for the solution to our sin.”

2. A Shared Truth is **universal** (i.e., it must be equally shared between all people of all time).

Example: “You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not worldly? ... When one says, ‘I follow Paul,’ and another, ‘I follow Apollos,’ are you not mere men?” (1 Cor 3:3-4)

-Poor statement: “The Corinthian church had a problem with hero-worship.” *This speaks only about one particular church, and also again describes only a past event.*

-Better statement: “Division in the church indicates worldliness.”

3. A Shared Truth reflects the same **main point** that the **text itself is emphasizing**—it’s what the author is ‘sharing’ with us.

Example: “Love your neighbor as yourself.” (Mat 22:39)

-Poor statement: “In order to love other people genuinely, we must first accept and love ourselves.” *It is not enough that a statement is true, or that it doesn’t contradict the Bible, or that you can “find” it in a verse. A principle must be something that either is clearly stated or is unquestionably implied as the point the author is trying to make in that passage.*

-Better statement: “It is our duty to love other people unselfishly.”

Additionally, a Shared Truth is **best stated as a single, complete sentence**.

-Poor statement: “Since Jesus as the Son of God shares in all the attributes of the Trinitarian Godhead, his sovereign power and healing grace are made available to all. That is why people need to trust in him to meet their holistic needs, physically, spiritually, emotionally, socially, mentally, etc.”

-Better statement: “We need to trust Jesus as the one to meet our needs.”

Types of Shared Truth

1. **“Teaching” (Expositional) Statement**: Statements that inform us of a truth—something we need to *know*.

Example: “For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Rom 8:38-39)

-Shared Truth: Nothing can thwart God’s love for those who are saved.

2. **“Urging” (Exhortational) Statements**: Truths that call for us to respond—something we need to *do*.

Example: “Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellow man has fulfilled the law.” (Rom 12:8)

Shared Truth: We should love each other. Whoever loves, obeys God.

How Do We Know Whether Our Shared Truth Is Valid?

The following questions are designed to help us decide this:

Is it an Old Testament teaching which is repeated in the New Testament?

-Point: If it was true in ancient Israel before Christ and also in the early church after Christ, then it is probably true for all time.

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-Example: “The righteous will live by his faith.” (Hab 2:4) This verse occurs not only in Habakkuk, but also in Rom 1:17; Gal 3:11, and Heb 10:38. It is very likely, then, that this is appropriate for all people of all times.

Is the reason for a specific command given in the passage?

-Point: While sometimes a specific command was intended for a limited time and place, the reason behind the command applies to everyone.

-Example: “Therefore, if what I eat causes my brother to fall into sin, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause him to fall.” (1 Cor 8:13) Here the issue isn’t about what kinds of food to eat, but about not causing others to sin.

Is it a statement about God?

-Point: Since God cannot change, any statement about him made in the past is still true today.

-Example: “YHWH is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love.” (Ex 34:6)

Is it a general statement about the character of mankind?

-Point: All people have two things in common: we were made in the image of God and we are sinful. Therefore, general statements about mankind which reflect these are always true.

-Example: “He who conceals his sins does not prosper, but whoever confesses and renounces them finds mercy.” (Prov 28:13) Shared Truth: “We should confess instead of conceal our sins.”

Is it a statement about the relationship of God and mankind?

-Point: There are truths that describe the relationship between God and human beings generally.

-Example: “God judges evil”; “God forgives those who repent”; etc.

If you are reading narrative literature, does the writer pass judgment on what is happening in the story?

-Point: If the narrator says that what a person did is good, then that person is an example to us.

-Example: “After Yahweh had said these things to Job, he said to Eliphaz the Temanite, ‘I am angry with you and your two friends, because you have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has.’” (Job 42:7)

-Point: If the narrator says that a particular action was bad, or if it is something that is clearly forbidden elsewhere in Scriptures, then that person is a negative example to us.

-Example: “Yahweh looked with favor on Abel and his offering, but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favor.” (Gen 4:4-5)

-Point: If the narrator makes no judgment, and the Scriptures do not clearly endorse or forbid that behavior elsewhere, then be careful! That behavior might still be wrong, or perhaps right, or perhaps it makes no difference—look for a clearer passage.

Important Note: Every biblical passage is teaching Shared (eternal, universal) Truth intended for all mankind. The issue is not whether some passages are relevant while others aren’t. Rather, we are looking at whether both the Shared Truth and the specific behavior mentioned in the passage are to be applied today, or if only the Shared Truth is to be applied today in culturally-equivalent ways.

STEP 4: RESPONDING

The final step, Responding, seeks to identify what are the implications of the Shared Truth for my own life, personally and specifically. *The Truth claims of the bible are not followed until or unless we respond in ways that are in keeping with the authors' intentions. The Bible both explains and demonstrates that understanding and responding are inseparable.*

Every single passage of Scripture has meaning and relevance for the believer. Whether directly or indirectly, all Scripture is profitable for Christian growth (see 2 Tim 3:16-17). Though a passage has only one meaning (what the author intended), it has many applications. The truth claims the author presents are not relative or dependent on the reader, but how those truths affect individual lives will be different for everyone.

Wrong Ideas About Responding to God's Word:

1. "Application will follow naturally and automatically if the text is just properly interpreted."
2. "It's up to the Holy Spirit to make it personal."
3. "The Bible is already relevant."
4. "The Bible's main purpose is to teach how we're supposed to act."

Responding to the Bible Should...

1. Be based on what the author intends: It should be founded upon proper understanding and should build on the Shared Truths. We do *not* start with, "What challenges or blesses me in this passage?" but with, "What truth does the author want me to grapple with in my own life that is being taught here?"
2. Involve us as complete persons: this includes our thinking, imagining, feeling, and doing. Begin with, "If this Shared Truth really is true, how would it affect my life?"
3. Be relevant: Responding should begin with prayerful self-evaluation.
4. Involve life change: In what ways has my previous *thinking* been flawed, and how do I need to change my thoughts? How is the author expecting me to use my *imagination*—reflecting on a figure of speech, calling me into a narrative world that is different from my familiar life, envisioning how my life could be different, etc. What *emotions* is the author seeking to evoke from me—shock, anger, laughter, sorrow, surprise, anticipation, etc.? How should change my outward *behaviors* in order to be consistent with the inward changes?

Tips for Creating Response Suggestions

-*Behavioral* response suggestions should be S.M.A.R.T.

Specific: in one week's time, I should know whether there has been improvement

Measurable: how can I evaluate my progress?

Attainable: they should stretch me, but be possible

Realistic: both what I should and what I can do (by the Holy Spirit's power)

Timely: How often? For how long? When?

-Limit the number of conditional applications: i.e. "If X happens, then I will ..." or "When(ever) X happens, I will ..." In your applications you should focus on actions which you initiate, rather than responses you anticipate. A few of these are okay, but not a majority.

Response Suggestions: Poor Examples vs. Better Examples

Shared Truth: "God is patient."

Poor Examples:

-Whenever I get angry, I should confess immediately.

-I will try to be less critical of people I don't like. I will pray for people instead of getting impatient

-I will try to be more patient, even when I don't feel like it.

-I will stop carrying grudges and being bitter.

-You should ask God to convict you about people you have a bad attitude against.

The above examples are general, conditional statements, or not a specific or measurable behavior, or they are merely second person finger-pointing.

Better Examples:

- Over the next week I will carry a notebook and pen, and record each time I get impatient with someone else. At the end of each of those days, I will confess that impatience, and pray for heightened awareness.
- For each of the instances I got impatient, I will consider how I could have handled it better.
- This next week I will identify at least 8 scriptural examples displaying God’s patience.
- This next week I will also write at least 8 specific examples of God’s patience in my own life.
- This month I will memorize these verses concerning God’s patience, and recite them out loud morning and night, so that I can start to reprogram my instinctive responses: Ex 34:6- 7; Rom 2:4; 1 Pet 3:8-9.

Questions to Ask When Applying a Passage

Are there sins which I need to confess? Are there habits which I need to revise? Are there attitudes which I need to adopt or alter? Are there promises which I need to trust in? Are there sacrifices which I need to consider making? Are there positive examples which I need to imitate? Are there errors which I need to avoid? Are there commands which I need to obey? Are there challenges which I need to accept?

Typical Problem Areas to Address in Making Relevant Applications:

- | | | |
|-----------------------------|---------------------|---------------------------|
| -Conflicts in relationships | -Discouragement | -Attitudes towards others |
| -Uncontrolled emotions | -Communication | -Addictive habits |
| -Difficult circumstances | -Financial matters | -Health matters |
| -Self-perception | -Use of time | -Integrity |
| -Priorities | -Crippling memories | -Depression |
| -Worry | -Boredom | -Unresolved guilt |
| -Self-preoccupation | -Self-control | -Struggles for power |

CONCLUSION

Hopefully this packet was helpful in providing some groundwork for how we can go about studying the Bible. There is so much more that could be said, and this was meant to be a concise intro and overview to methods for studying the Bible, particularly as taught by Dr. Ray Lubeck at Multnomah University. If you would like more practice, or are interested in diving deeper, I cannot commend highly enough to you his book, *Read the Bible for a Change: Understanding and Responding to God’s Word*. You will find that he is an engaging and fun writer, and the content is very accessible. The book, and his teaching, have changed the way I read the Bible, which as a result has changed my life!

I know that for many, this is like drinking from a firehose. If you have not had any formal training, or have never thought this way about reading the Bible, these methods may seem quite intimidating. As you learn to read, understand, and respond in what is potentially a new way, things may feel uncomfortable. (I know I experienced all of these things at first!) But if you are tempted to ditch it early on, I would encourage you: *DON’T!* When you are sitting down to read any given part of Scripture, it’s not that you are supposed to go through every single question and possibility, or spend 30 minutes on each individual step. These methods are about shaping the way that you read and approach God’s Word, so that eventually, it becomes second nature. They are intended to help you recognize the author’s style of writing in any biblical passage, and by knowing this, learning to ask and explore the most fruitful questions to get at the meaning of the passage. You will begin to value not just reading the Bible, but what it really means to *follow* it, involving your heart, mind, imagination, actions, and emotions in the process. The point of my professor’s book, *Read the Bible for a Change*, is just that—that in *changing* the way you read God’s Word, you would experience *change*. “By practicing these steps for yourself, you will embark on a lifetime quest of Bible reading that will enable you to see for yourself how exciting it is when we read it on its own terms rather than ours.”⁴

⁴ Ray Lubeck, *Read the Bible for a Change*, p. xvii.