

Bible Reading Tools

Sometimes as we are reading the Bible, there will be parts that are hard for us to understand. It's kind of like the first time we picked up a map and tried to understand it. I remember the first time I picked up a map and looked at it. I didn't know what all the lines and markings on it meant. But then someone showed me that a certain kind of line meant a road, and a blue line meant a river and another kind of marking meant cities, and another kind meant mountains. It started to make a lot more sense. Our heavenly road map, the Bible, is similar. It can be confusing to understand if we don't know how to read the "markings" in it. Today, we want to give some practical tips to help us get the most out of our time in the Bible. Today we will focus on 3 things:

- 1) **The big story of the Bible.**
- 2) **The parts of the Bible and the kinds of writing in the Bible.**
- 3) **Questions to ask to help you understand what you are reading.**

1. **The Big Story of the Bible** – When we are reading a map it's really important to know what it's a map of. This helps us understand the picture better. The same is true of the Bible. When we are reading the Bible we need to understand the big picture.

The Bible from Genesis to Revelation is made up of 66 books that tell the story of God and His plan for mankind. It is a love letter from our loving Heavenly Father. It tells a long story of how God our Father wanted a family He could be with forever. God is love. Therefore, God created the world and human beings so He could have a family from every nation, tribe, and language who He could love, and they would freely love Him in return.

The Bible begins with telling the story of how God created the world perfect and without sin. Then God's enemy, Satan, deceives mankind into disobeying God and obeying Satan instead. God did not give up on His plan to have a family who would choose to love Him. He promised a Rescuer who would save people from their sin and the power of Satan and restore the human relationship with God. Over the 4,000 years from when mankind first sinned against God and when God sends His Son to fulfill the promise of a Rescuer, God provides a way for people to have relationship with Him. When Jesus, His Son, is born it is the beginning of the end of the power of Satan. Jesus lives a perfect life, healing the sick and casting out devils and teaching about the Kingdom of God. Then, He died on the cross and after three days rose from the grave, conquering sin, Satan, and death. His death and resurrection opened way for all peoples and nations to have relationship with God and for God's great desire for a family who would love Him freely to finally be fulfilled.

2. **The parts of the Bible**
Old Testament

The whole first section of the Bible, which we call the **Old Testament**, is where hear the story of God giving the promise of the Savior of all peoples. God then brings forth the people of Israel, the nation through who the promised Savior will come. The Old Testament tells the story of God giving Laws to Israel, but Israel is not able to keep the Laws. Yet God is patient and faithful to Israel and in His love, God shows more of what the promised Savior will be like and what He will accomplish. A simple way to break down the Old Testament is

- The Law – The first five books of the Bible.
- The Prophets – The rest of the Old Testament.

New Testament



The New Testament shows the fulfillment of the promise with the birth of the Savior, Jesus Christ. It tells us the story of Jesus' birth, His life, His ministry, His death and resurrection. It goes on to tell us about the birth of the church and to explain how the promise of God should work out in our lives. It also foretells the ultimate fulfillment of the promise when Satan is removed once and for all from the earth and God comes to live with His family on the earth.

- The Gospels— these books tell story of Christ
- Acts – tell us about the birth of the church.
- Letters to the churches - explain how the promise should work in the life of believers
- The Book of Revelation – The culmination of God's story, when God finally removes the influence of Satan and sin from the earth and God comes to live with His people who will be His family forever.

Knowing what section of the Bible we are reading in and the kind of writing we are looking at helps us understand what we are reading better and give us a framework to understand it through.

3) Questions to ask to help you understand what you are reading.

Now that you know a little bit more about what you are looking at as you read, now you are more ready to make some observations about the scripture. Ask yourself questions like these:

- What kind of writing is what you are reading? Where is it at in God's story – Old or New Testament?
- What do the verses show us about God, Jesus, Holy Spirit, or His plan?
- What do they show us about humans? About believers in Christ? The Church?
- What is God asking you to believe or do from this scripture?
- What changes do you need to make or action do you need to take?
- Who can I share this with?

This might seem like a lot of questions, and to be honest, these questions can lead you to more questions. Sometimes you will spend more time answering these questions than others. If the Holy Spirit leads you to stay on a section of scripture longer, then do. The most important thing is to listen to what the Holy Spirit has to say and enter into a conversation with the Author of the book. The Holy Spirit as our teacher will often guide us to a certain passage of scripture that we are to pay special attention to. Many times people say when this happens it's like the passage "stands out" to them or like the words were highlighted. This is part of how God leads us. As we feel Holy Spirit speaking, we should slow down and ask what He wants to say. Sometimes even when you do all these things you may find that there is a part you have a hard time understanding. You can also ask people in your life who you trust these questions, too.

Finally, remember the Word of God should always lead us to obedience, either by believing or doing something different in our lives after reading. This is when God's Word becomes personal.

James 1:22-25 - "But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was. But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does."

Let the Word of God lead you into an encounter with the author of the Bible and as you encounter Him in the Word, may that lead you to prayer. Let the Word have its work in you, changing the way you think and the way you live. (Romans 12:2)

When we read the Bible and discover the good things in the Bible, we should also want to share it with others, just like we would want to share good news with people in our lives. We should ask who we can share what we learned from the Bible and go and share it with them.

Reflect

How can you better understand the Word of God?

- a) Ask the Holy Spirit to open up our understanding and teach us the truth.
- b) Ask questions of the Bible as you read.
- c) Pray the truths from the Bible back to God.
- d) Observe different things from the scripture as you read.
- e) Seek to apply truth to your life.
- f) Share it with someone.