

HOW TO STUDY THE BIBLE LESSON

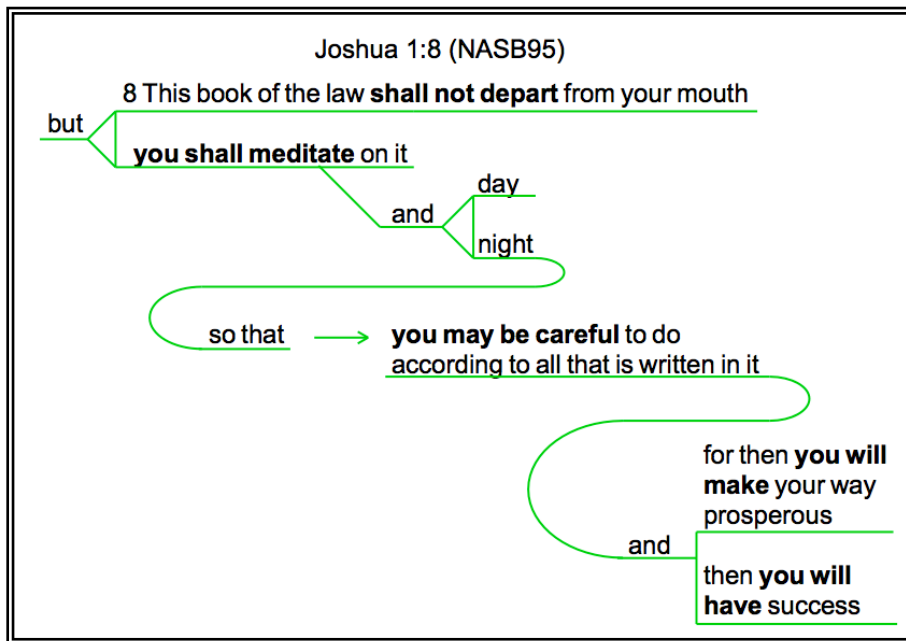
Application and Hermeneutics Overview

Lesson #4

TEACHER'S TIP

*“Many lay aside Scripture as rusty armor;
they are better read in romances than in St. Paul;
they spend many hours “between the comb and the glass;”
but their eyes begin to be sore when they look upon a Bible.”¹*

Creating a teaching outline from Josh. 1:8: “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 success.”




“YOUR THREE STEPS TO BIBLICAL SUCCESS”

- I. YOU MUST SPEAK THE WORD
- II. YOU MUST MEDITATE ON THE WORD
- III. YOU MUST OBEY THE WORD

CONCLUSION: YOU WILL HAVE SUCCESS AND BE PROSPEROUS IF YOU DO THESE THINGS!

¹Thomas Watson, *Supplement to the Morning Exercises at Cripplegate, “How to Read the Scriptures,”* Sermon 8. (London: Thomas Cockerill, 1674) 112.

So far, we have worked through some of the basic Bible study principles (hermeneutics). We have discovered the importance of **genre, historical background, theme, outline, far context, near context, cultural customs, word studies**, and how this leads to **interpretation**. Think of an hourglass when studying the Bible. You start with the broadest and widest observations and then narrow down to the details of the text. After you get to the details, you began to expand the details with interpretation, principles, application, and implementation.

THE BIBLE STUDY HOUR GLASS	
Genre or Kind of Book is the broadest overview of the text -----	
Historical Background narrows down your search -----	
Theme narrows down your search a bit more -----	
Outline begins to look at broad details -----	
Far Context looks at what surrounds your text -----	
Near context looks at what is right before and after your text -----	
Cultural Customs are helpful for details in your text -----	
Word Studies look at specific words in your text -----	
Interpretation begins to expand upon the meaning of the details -----	
Principles are truths that apply to all believers in any age -----	
Applications are the many ways to apply the principles -----	
Implementation is how each person should apply the application to their own life. -----	

What we have learned so far are the more fundamental principles needed to study almost any text of the Bible. Yet, this is only the tip of the iceberg! But don't get scared because we are not going to give you the entire iceberg in this series. Having said that, I do want to expose you briefly to some of the other Bible study principles so that you know they exist. I also want to look at the relationship between studying the Bible and teaching the Bible.

- I. **HOW BIBLE STUDY PRINCIPLES (HERMENEUTICS) RELATES TO BIBLE STUDY (EXEGESIS) AND BIBLE TEACHING (EXPOSITION)**
 - A. **Bible Study Principles (hermeneutics)** are the principles, methods, tools and rules used to arrive at an accurate interpretation of the biblical text.
 - B. **Bible Study (exegesis)** Just knowing the Bible study principles is not enough, we must study the Bible. This is called **exegesis** which means *"to take information out of the text."* The evil twin sister of exegesis is "eisegesis" which means *"to read information into the text."*
 - C. **Bible teaching or preaching (exposition)** Once we discover what the text says and means by what it says we can then "expose" the meaning of the text to those we teach. This is called **exposition**, the process of *putting the truth of the Bible on display*. Exposition is when we teach or preach the meaning and purpose of a text to others.

I. FINDING TIMELESS PRINCIPLES AND APPLICATION IN A TEXT

- A. Many things could be said at this point about finding application from the text. Below I will give you some basic principles you can use to help you find biblical principles that will lead you to application from any text.
- B. Some texts tell you flat out what to do.
- C. Other texts may be speaking about others in a different culture, time, and situation. For example:
1. Stories in the Old Testament
 2. Laws in the book of Leviticus
 3. Promises made to specific people in a different time and culture
 4. Proverbs of wisdom
 5. Psalms of praise
 6. Prophecies of events that already occurred or will occur
- D. If the text you are studying does not give you specific and universal “How to instruction” use these guidelines:
1. Keep the main theme of the book and the near context in mind!
 2. Ask yourself, “What does this text teach me about God?”
 3. Ask yourself, “What does this text teach me about how God relates to man?”
 4. Ask yourself, “What does this text teach me about how man relates to God?”
 5. Ask yourself, “Are there good examples to follow or bad examples in this text to follow?”
 6. Concerning promises in the Bible, Bernard Ramm writes:

“Every promise in the book is mine” is one of the overstatements of the century. Few Bible promises partake of such universality. In applying the promises of the Bible to our specific situations we need to exercise great care. If we apply promises to ourselves that are not for us, we may suffer severe disappointment. Also, promises must not be used to tempt God. A reserve and a patience should temper all our usages of promises.”

a. *Note whether the promise is universal in scope.* The classic example of a universal promise is “and whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely” (Rev. 22:18). General invitations to salvation are for all men, but invitations to prayer or to special blessings are

only for the company of the saved.

- b. *Note whether the promise is personal.* When God said to Paul, “Be not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace: for I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee” (Acts 18:9–10), that was personal to Paul and may not be used generally. Missionaries in difficult situations may hope for this type of deliverance but may not command it.
- c. *Note whether the promise is conditional.* When it says “Draw nigh unto God and he will draw nigh to you” (James 4:8), there is a human condition to be fulfilled before the promise is received.
- d. *Note whether the promise is for our time.* Some promises pertain just to the Jews in their land and have ceased with the coming of the New Testament. Some promises refer to future conditions that shall prevail upon the earth at the close of the age.²

I. OTHER IMPORTANT BIBLE STUDY PRINCIPLES

Below is a chart surveying the more common Bible study principles. These are the rules or tools you can use to get at an accurate meaning of the text. Some principles you use all the time, like context, others you only use some of the time, like cultural customs. Yet it is good to know what tools are available just in case you need them.

Principle	Definition
Analogy of the faith	This principle states that the Bible is unified in what it teaches. In other words, no Scripture when interpreted correctly will contradict another Scripture or the unified teaching of the whole Bible.
Checking principle	This principle states that we should use other scholarly sources to check, affirm, modify, or refine our interpretations.
Clarity of Scripture	This principle says everything in God's Word is knowable to every believer. It does not mean every believer knows the meaning of all of Scripture.
Clearest interpretation	This principle states that the clearest, easiest interpretation is to be preferred over a harder, more obscure interpretation.
Christological principle	This principle recognizes that the redemptive plan of God through Christ is "the" or "a" major theme of the Scriptures. Christ can be found in "all" or "many" scriptures throughout the Bible. We can understand our text better when we understand how it fits into the redemptive plan of God.

² Bernard Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation: a Textbook of Hermeneutics*, Third Revised Edition. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1970), 192–193.

Principle	Definition
Context (near, far, within the Bible)	Context is one of the most important hermeneutical principles. Context is what comes before and after a passage. Near context deals with the verses immediately preceding and following the text under study. Far context is how your text fits into the entire book or a major section within the book you are studying. Context within the Bible seeks to discover how the book you are studying fits in to the entire Bible corpus. The principle of context is always applied. Near context is most important followed by far and biblical contexts.
Cultural customs	This principle states that certain words, phrases, things, and events can sometimes be better understood by studying their cultural history.
Genre or literary type	This principle states that all Scripture falls into a certain kind of literary mold or genre. By identifying the genre one is aided in interpreting the Scriptures.
Geographical studies	This principle states that geographical studies often assist in the accurate interpretation of Scripture.
Grammar studies	This principle states that interpretation is aided by identifying the structure (syntactical analysis) of passages according to paragraphs, sentences, and words.
Historical background or historical priority	This principle states that we must interpret Scripture in light of its historical background and setting, not ours.
Interpretation, principles, application	This principle states that there is a three-fold goal of hermeneutics i.e., interpretation, principles, and application. The interpretation or meaning of a passage is one, the principles are the timeless truths contained within the text which may be one or more, the application of the principles is usually many.
Maintain literal interpretation	This principle states that all Scripture is to be interpreted literally, historically, and grammatically. The literal method recognizes figures of speech and literary devices but realizes they derive their meaning from the literal meaning of words and phrases.
Priority of the original languages	This principle states that the original languages (Hebrew & Greek) have priority over the other languages into which the Scriptures have been translated.
Revelation is progressive	This principle recognizes that often revelation progresses from simple to complex, vague to clear, incomplete to complete.
Revelation is accommodated	This principle is that God's revelation speaks to man on his level. God describes the unfamiliar with the familiar.
Scripture interprets Scripture (also called cross reference)	This principle states that individual and specific texts can usually be interpreted more clearly and accurately when they are compared to other Scriptures which teach or discuss the same subject matter.
Unity of the meaning of Scripture	Each passage has one meaning, not two or three. In some cases, the one meaning may have near and future fulfillments or more than one part.

Principle	Definition
Word studies	This principle states that the interpretation of Scripture is enhanced through word studies (lexical analysis). By using lexicons, theological word books, and theological dictionaries the key words of Scripture can be better understood.

I. HOMEWORK

- A. **Read the appendix** at the end of this lesson entitled, “Implementation: The Missing Ingredient.” Consider the importance of not only “knowing” what the application is, but also but how to put the application into practice.
- B. **Study Psa. 1:1-3** and see if you can create a teaching outline and summary interpretation of what these verses teach as a whole.
1. See if you can break down **Psa. 1:1-3** into main points and sub points.
 2. Group similar points under the heading of one main point, if necessary.
 3. Make a teaching outline from these verses as if you were going to teach a Sunday school class or give a talk to others about what this text means.
 4. Then create a title for your study/talk/sermon that matches the overall meaning of all the points and the meaning of the text. Make sure your title and each of the main points of the teaching outline include the second person “You” or “Your” or a command.
 5. Write a summary paragraph of what **Psa. 1:1-3** means or teaches.
 6. Write out some principles from the text that would apply to any believer of any age.

“Implementation: The Missing Ingredient”³

“Are you reading your Bibles?” the preacher asks his congregation with probing seriousness. “Last week, how many days did you neglect spending time in the Word?” he asks again causing most of his congregation to cringe with conviction and guilt. “You need to read your Bibles!” the preacher exhorts, waving his Bible in the air for emphasis as he concludes his exposition of Psalm 19:7-14. By the end of the sermon his congregation has been pierced through with conviction. They know he is telling them the truth. They realize they need to spend more time reading their Bibles. After the service many leave with a weight of guilt hanging on them like a load of wet bricks. They want to be right with God. They want to have the Scriptures richly dwelling within them. They want to be faithful students of the Word. But if the truth was told and usually it is not, especially to the preacher, they feel defeated

³I originally wrote this article for: *The Journal of Modern Ministry*, Vol. 1, Issue 1, Spring 2004.

and exasperated. Why? Because they don't know how to go about reading their Bible, at least not in a meaningful way! It may seem so simple and obvious to us, but for many it is complex and difficult.

One of the things I tell my preaching students over and over again is, "*If you convict someone with the truth of God's Word, you must give them a way out. You must make sure that when they leave church after being convicted by the Word, they know how to relieve the guilt through obedience. They need to know how to put the truth into practice.*" The fact is, most Christians approach the Bible like any other book instead of reading it as God's instruction book for their lives. They start at the beginning in Genesis, carry on into Exodus where they lose a little traction towards the end of that book, and plow into Leviticus, only to get stuck in the mud-hole of the Levitical sacrificial system.

They have no idea why Leviticus is good for them except as a cure for insomnia. They may understand that "*all Scripture is profitable for teaching, reproof, correction and training in righteousness*" (II Timothy 3:16), but their experience doesn't seem to line up with what they know in their minds is true. They agree with you that they need to read their Bible, but they frankly don't know how. "Maybe," they think to themselves, "it's because there is something wrong with me."

Yet the blame is often to be laid at the feet of the preacher. Preachers often assume their congregations only need to be convicted by the truth. They assume that people will figure out how to live out the truth on their own after they are convicted. Preachers like this may have never stopped to consider the difference between principles, application, and implementation. They may be excellent exegetes, engaging expositors, convicting communicators and yet fail to give their people practical *how to* instruction. Their congregation leaves Sunday after Sunday feeling guilty, but not knowing what to do. This is why you must stop and consider the difference between *principle, application, and implementation*.

Biblical principles are truths, which apply to Christians of any culture and any time. The preacher, using sound Bible study principles, studies the text so that he can interpret it accurately. Then he extracts biblical principles from the interpretation, which apply to Christians of any culture and time. Using Psalm 19:7-14 as an example, one of the obvious principles, which comes from this portion of Scripture, is, *the Word of God is powerful to sanctify the believer*. This principle applies to all believers of any culture and any time. There are no exceptions. If you are going to grow in sanctification, it is going to be through the Word of God. And most preachers do a pretty good job at getting principles out of the text. But too often they never move on to application.

Application is how the principles of the text might be obeyed. In the case of Psalm 19:7-14, one of the applications is, "Read your Bible!" This is *what* must be done. People know what reading is, and they know what the Bible is, and they understand the concept of reading the Bible. No problem so far. But for many, the very simple exhortation, "Read your Bible," is like saying, "Go rebuild a car engine." Rebuilding a car engine is also an easy concept to understand. The problem is not with the concept, the problem is with the *implementation of the concept*. Just how do you go about rebuilding an engine? If you don't know anything about engine rebuilding, how would you find out how to do so? For a trained mechanic rebuilding a car engine is not a problem, for the rest of us, it is very complex and difficult. Well, in the same way, the seminary trained pastor has no problem reading the Bible, but for those who do not have specialized training in Bible reading, it is a very complicated process. People need more than just the bottom line application, "Read your Bible!" They need to know how to implement the truth, *how specifically does a person go about reading the Bible for profit*.

Implementation is the missing ingredient. The next step after application is the practical instruction of *how one might go about putting into practice the application of a text*. To provide implementation is to give concrete methods, techniques, and procedures one might use for living out the application e.g., reading the Bible. Implementation also seeks to bring people to the place where they say, "I am going to apply this truth to my life this week by doing. . ." If implementation is not achieved in the lives of your congregation, preaching loses its purpose because the purpose of preaching is to change the way people live before a holy God.

It is for this reason *you must help them*. You're the expert, you are the one with the seminary training, you know the issues that must be faced when the Bible is read, so tell them what you

know! Don't just heap a bunch of conviction on them and send them out of church every Sunday loaded down to the axle with guilt. This will surely lead to their exasperation.

So in the adapted words of the Philippian jailer, "What must you do to help your congregation implement the text?" Let's say you are preaching from Psalm 19:7-14 and you discover in that text that the Word of God is powerful to sanctify a believer. You give your congregation the application, "You need to read your Bibles!" Now it's implementation time. It is time for you, with your greater understanding of the complexities of Bible reading, to help them out. You might give them examples of how someone might go about learning to read their Bible. Most people assume, unless someone teaches them differently, that you read the Bible like any other book, start at the beginning and read to the end. There is nothing wrong with this approach, but the fact is, most people don't make it through the book of Leviticus and they don't know how to get application for their lives from the text.

You need to put yourself into the place of a new believer and consider what will help them. Most people do not have the books of the Bible memorized let alone understand the many complexities of how to read the Bible for the most spiritual profit. The complexities of Bible reading are clear to you, but often very unclear to your congregation. Christians thirst for the knowledge of God, but when they read the Bible it is often like trying to suck water out of a block of damp wood. They get a little moisture but not enough to survive. *This is why you need to help them implement the truth of God's Word.*

For instance, you might recommend some good resources on how to study the Bible or tell them to attend a class that you will be teaching on Bible reading. Tell them to try reading five Psalms a day so that in a month they will have read through the entire book of Psalms. Tell them that there are thirty-one chapters in the book of Proverbs and tell them they might try reading whatever chapter of proverbs corresponds to the day of the month. Suggest that they might want to alternate reading books from the Old Testament and the New, or use a schedule for reading through the Bible in a year. But don't stop there!

Speak to them directly in the second person and say, "Right now, before the Lord, when are you going to set aside time to read your Bible? How are you going to read your Bible tomorrow? If you don't know how to read the Bible in a profitable way, what are you going to do about it this week?" Now they have no excuse. You have interpreted the text for them, drawn out principles from the interpretation, given them application, and clear ideas of how to implement the text. They may still leave feeling guilty, but now they will know what they can do to apply the text to their lives. This is what you want, this is what they want, and this is what God wants!

Guard against exhortation without implementation for it leads to exasperation. Recently, I preached through Luke 3:1-15. In that section of Luke's gospel John the Baptist is calling sinners to repentance and threatening judgment for those who will not turn from their sin. The crowds are convicted of their sin and they realize they do need to repent. The concept is easy for them to understand but what they don't understand is what repentance will look like in their lives. This causes them to ask John the Baptist, "*Then what shall we do?*" Then John gives them five practical ways to implement true repentance in their lives (Luke 3:11-15). People need to know how to implement the truth of the text.

Try this. For the next month, make sure that every sermon you preach gives practical ways people can implement the truth. Give specific examples, steps, procedures and instruction for applying the text and see what kind of feedback you get. Your congregation will love you for it and become spiritually fat sheep who know how to live the truth. Christians want to obey, but they need help – so help them implement the truth!