

A few thoughts as you read the Bible

The ultimate mindset when reading the Bible is to keep this question in mind, "what am I reading about?" The author wrote words because he wanted me to SEE something specific. And he wants it to be rather obvious. He doesn't want to keep it a secret. I may not understand everything going on (because of history, language, etc) but I can, if I will look, I can see the what is going on.

When approaching a Bible text, the first thing to determine is whether I am reading a STORY or a SERIES of statements (ex. Paul's writings in the New Testament.)

If it's a **story**, approach it like this:

What are key events in the story? Obviously the biblical stories contain many events, but many of them are not key. They are interesting for sure but they are not the main point. Something is key when the story depends on it. In other words, the story would lose its power if that event were missing. So as you identify one key event in a story, then begin to look for another key event. And then notice what happened so that these two key events were linked. Biblical stories become meaningful to us when we see the events that caused the story to have such impact, either positively or negatively. And we also see the importance of decisions by man or God that linked the key events.

Another thing to consider when you are reading a story is to ask, "Is the story trying to teach me something about God at this moment, or is it trying to teach me something about man?"

When the story is focusing much attention on activity of God, ask, "WHAT am I to learn about God?"

At this point, it is CRITICAL to remember that the REASON I am being presented with new information about God is for the stirring of my AFFECTIONS. The text is inviting me to trust Him more, enjoy Him more, obey Him more, to believe something about Him, to turn from sin that dishonors Him. etc As we interact with the text we should be making constant adjustments in our life – because we have learned something new about God or about ourselves in relation to God.

Now let's move to the possibility that the **story talked a lot about man**. So I ask, WHAT does the writer want me to know about human nature (my nature), human tendencies, (my tendencies) WHAT am I to learn about ME in this text? What am I to learn about how people faithfully follow God, so that I can faithfully follow God? Or what am I to learn about how people fail to follow God that I might respond differently to those areas where they stumbled? The key to reading is to see yourself in the text because YOU are there! And for preachers, to see your people in the text, because "they" are there.

Now, as we know, not every Bible text is story. Many texts are a series of **statements**.

Again, as we saw with our approach to stories, we again want to look for KEYS. With stories we looked for key events. With portions of Scripture that contain a lot of statements, we are to look for KEY words. A key word is a unique word, a special word. It stands out. It's a difference maker in the sentence. In other words, if it were NOT there, the sentence would lose its impact. If you want to find great joy in reading your Bible, then enjoy circling and underlining key words.

And eventually, responding to God in prayer regarding how those key words mean to your life. Ultimately, this is the purpose of all Bible reading - application. We read in such a way that it leads us to re-state these truths in prayer. Good reading always leads to talking. That is, as the text speaks to us, we respond to God with words like "thank you" or "help me", etc.

In reading the sections of the Bible that contain statements, we also want to learn to ask certain questions. The first is question is : WHAT am I reading: That is, WHAT is the basic message being conveyed here?

Is it a command?
Is it a promise?
Is it a warning?
Etc.

Obviously there are number of scenarios, but the point is to get us to start thinking about the WHAT (command, promise, warning, etc).

Now let's talk about the other questions to consider. Once you have have a general sense of WHAT you are reading, then ask WHY and HOW questions. Example;

Ex. If it's a command, then you ask WHY should I obey this command?

Why should I believe this promise?

Why should I listen to this warning?

At this point, it is important to look at the text. The answer to the WHY is probably close by. The text will tell you WHY to obey. For example, in Romans 12:2 Paul gives Two commands

"Do not be conformed to the world" **WHAT**

Be transformed by the renewing of your mind" **HOW**

So this two statements above are the WHAT – I am fairly certain, at least in a general way, WHAT the author is talking about. In this case, the WHAT is I am supposed to obey a command "Do not be conformed to the world.

Now he moves on to tell us the **WHY** - "so you can know God's will" (Romans 12:3)

In addition to answering WHY questions, we also want to answer HOW questions when reading statements in the Bible.

For example, if the statement I am reading is a command, I might ask

How can I obey this command?

For instance, when the Bible says in Romans 8 that we are to "put to death the sins of the flesh", it THEN tells us HOW. He tells us how by means of a prepositional phrase - "by the Spirit"

We put to death the sins of the flesh BY THE SPIRIT.

Those three words, by the Spirit, are a phrase. More specifically they are called a prepositional phrase because they begin with a preposition. In this case the preposition is the word BY (other prepositions would be words such as through, in, for) . Prepositional phrases are a group of word that contain a noun but no verb. They often are the key which allows us to better understand an action or command that is nearby in the sentence.

Ex. By grace are you saved through faith.

The big idea, the main idea is, the WHAT, is that I am saved. But the prepositional phrase is equally important because it tells me HOW I am saved – BY grace, THROUGH faith

Now that you are aware of the importance of phrases, you can begin to look at another grouping of words called propositions. A proposition is a group of words that use a subject and verb to make a claim.

The reason why it is important to notice propositions is because they are often LINKED with another proposition in the verse. The linking together of these propositions will help you understand the WHY. (ex. why believe, why obey, why trust)

Propositions are often linked together with words such as "therefore" "But" "in order that " "because"

For example, 1 Corinthians 6:20 contains two propositions that are linked together with the word "therefore."

1 Corinthians 6

(20) you were bought at a price. (proposition #1)

Therefore honor God with your bodies. (proposition #2)

As you grow in your Bible reading, you will also want to ask how this section you are reading relates to other parts of the Bible. Many times you will see where other parts of the Bible confirm what you are reading which will cause this passage to impact you even more. But sometimes you will read something that looks like a contradiction to another part of the Bible. At this point, it is always right to assume that your understanding is underdeveloped instead of an error in the Bible. You will grow greatly as you seek to gain clarity when reading your Bible.

Make sure that in all Bible reading you are aware on the "tone" of the text. Feel what the author felt when he was writing. Feel the hope in the text, or the danger, or the ugliness, etc. But read it as if you are getting this information "real time" - as if you are watching the news about something that is happening now.