

HOW DO I READ THE BIBLE?

ADDITIONAL INSIGHTS

Read **John 3:16**.

The Bible reading website biblegateway.com collected data from their readers that indicated that the most searched and studied Bible verse on their site (and likely on the internet overall) is **John 3:16**. Millions of people all over the world have heard or read that verse. It's likely that you have heard and seen it in many different contexts over the course of your life as well. Maybe you've seen it on a football field or painted on a sign. You may have felt anger or curiosity at how it was used, or it may have comforted or taught you at an early point in your faith. Some people refer to it as "the golden text." For all of these reasons, it's easy with a passage like this to neglect studying and observing it more deeply to understand the context and meaning for our lives today. But **John 3:16** is a great example of the kind of rich, personal growth that we can experience from spending time on a text that we have previously regarded as greeting card inspiration or Christian billboard material.

Now read **John 3:1–19**. Read it slowly and make as many observations as you can about the characters, setting, dialogue, repetition, and imagery. Also consider the author and his audience.

The beauty of this passage comes from its nature as a personal, one-on-one conversation between Jesus and the religious leader Nicodemus. Jesus's words were not plastered on a billboard or yelled from a pulpit. They weren't written in isolation and handed out blindly. The truth of these words came directly from the Savior of the world to a man who was curious about his faith and troubled by his doubt. He was exploring his questions about God and needed the truth that Jesus came to offer. Thankfully, we have the opportunity to learn from his conversation with Jesus, and to study with care the words of John, who recorded it all for the sake of all who would believe. This is the opportunity that we are afforded when we read the Bible and approach it slowly and intentionally.

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THINK ABOUT IT

- 1. Context:** Open your Bible to the first page of the book of John. Typically a good study Bible will give you context for the history, geography, timeline, major themes, events, and even an outline of the book. Take a few minutes to read and annotate the introductory pages to this Gospel. These elements will help you when you observe the text. It will give you perspective on the who, what, when, where and why as you read.
- 2. Observation and Interpretation:** Now open to **John Chapter 2**, which is the account of Jesus's first public miracle, and the launch of his ministry. Read 2:1–11, then take a few minutes to observe these details closely:
 - Repetition: What words or ideas are repeated and why might John have chosen to emphasize them?
 - Dialogue: Whose words do we see in dialogue? What do they show about their emotions, character, and intentions?
 - Imagery: What images does John choose to include in this account? Why? What do you think he's trying to show his reader about Jesus? About the others present?
- 3. Application:** Now consider John's record of Jesus's first public miracle as it relates to your orthodoxy (what you believe) and your orthopraxy (what you do because of what you believe). What application do you see to your life as a Christian here? Sometimes the answer is very simple, and sometimes it takes time and prayer to unfold. Be patient with yourself and humble as you ask God what he would have you learn here.

APPLY IT

This week, read **1 Corinthians 10:11** and **James 1:22**. What expectations do Paul and James seem to have of those who read Scripture? Is there anything that you'd like to do daily or weekly in light of what you're learning?

FOR GROUP DISCUSSION (IF DESIRED)

- 1.** What words from Scripture have been meaningful to you over the course of your life? Even if you didn't grow up exposed to the Bible regularly, were there any ideas or words that you learned that meant something to you?
- 2.** What part of the Bible is most interesting to you currently? Where would you like to focus your reading as you practice observation, interpretation, and application?