

Lesson 1 - Introduction

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Most Christians would agree that reading and understanding God's Word is essential to our growth as Christians. Yet, even when they make an honest effort to study the Bible, many Christians struggle to develop a regular habit of doing so or they struggle with understanding what they read. It might be fair to say that a large portion of Christians experience both. It is also fair to say that success in one area should lead to success in the other.

Hermeneutics is the study of interpretation. This class will primarily focus on the part of our struggle to understand what the Bible says. Hopefully, it will also help you develop a more regular habit of being in God's Word. By the time we reach the end of the class, we hope that you:

- develop a _____ of Bible study that will enable you to see how individual passages relate to the _____ Bible.
- identify _____ resources to aid in your study of the Bible.
- grow in your _____ of God's Word.
- grow more like _____.

Those last two objectives are really the main goal of this class. The first two are just tools to accomplish that most important mission. Before we get into the details of *HOW* to study the Bible, it is imperative we understand *WHAT* the Bible is.

What does it mean for Scripture to be "inspired"?

The *inspiration* of the Bible is of great importance because from it, ALL Christian doctrines are developed. The final authority in all matters rests upon the Bible. It is the record of God's communication through men, what we would call *revelation*. When it comes to our ability to understand Scripture so that we can properly form doctrine, God himself drives this work. Let's look at how this is accomplished.

What does 2 Timothy 3:16 say about Scripture? _____

How does Job 32:8 say that we are able to understand it? _____

Both verses above refer to the breath of God. The word *theopneustos* in 2 Timothy literally means divinely breathed in. It tells us that God enabled man to correctly record his revealed truth, i.e. inspiration. *Neshāmâ* is the word used in Job to refer to the breath of God. Here, we see that God *illuminates* man so that he can understand that which has been revealed.

How did God accomplish this work of inspiration?

There are four broad views on the method God used to inspire the men who wrote the Bible.

- 1) _____ - men were inspired by some innate ability to create meaningful descriptions of “religious” themes
- 2) _____ - God gave men the words to pen, while overriding their personalities, i.e. they were like robots
- 3) _____ - some portions of the Bible are true and others are false. The stories involving miraculous events - the virgin birth, the resurrection, the creation account - are usually considered false.
- 4) _____ - God superintended the authors work so that the words they used were the ones he wanted. This differs from a *mechanical* view in that God used the life experiences of the authors as preparation for their writings.

This class proceeds from the perspective of plenary inspiration. Now that we have established some of what we believe about God’s Word, let’s look at the various ways in which we can study it.

Different Approaches to Interpreting the Bible

Historically, four major approaches to interpreting the Bible have been employed to understand its meaning.

- 1) _____ interpretation - What are the *ethical* lessons to be learned from this passage?
- 2) _____ - What are the *typological* meanings of the people, places, and events of this passage?
- 3) _____ - What are the *hidden* meanings of the text that will explain the life to come?

- 4) _____ - What is the *plain* meaning conveyed by the grammatical construction and historical context of the passage?

Over the last two centuries, other academic and philosophical approaches have emerged.

- 1) _____ - What is the *origin* of the text?
- 2) _____ - What does the Bible say to *me* personally?
- 3) _____ - What is the author's original *intended* meaning of the text?

Bible Study Methods

Study methods are usually classified as either *deductive* or *inductive*. When it comes to studying the Bible, deductive methods are most often _____ in nature. Someone might want to know what the Bible says about marriage. They look up all the passages referring to marriage and from that collection of verses develop an application or principle. In other words, deductive studies are looking for passages to support a pre-existing interpretation. If those passages reveal a different interpretation, then the person doing the study will have to adjust his or her understanding of the principle.

Inductive studies are _____ centered. Someone doing an inductive Bible study might want to know what a particular passage means. They would read the passage, make observations about the text, interpret the passage based on those observations, then apply it to their own lives. Inductive Bible studies are generally characterized by the *observation-interpretation-application* cycle.

Inductive Bible Study

In this class, you will learn how to do an inductive Bible study from a historical-grammatical approach. We will proceed with the understanding that God used the life experiences of the chosen writers of the books of the Bible and the recipients' life experiences to communicate a specific message. We want to determine *who* the writer is, from *where* and *when* he wrote them, *what* words God chose, *how* he linked them together, and *why*.

We will use the familiar Observation-Interpretation-Application cycle. Most people are accustomed to using this cycle with passages that vary in size from one verse to an entire

paragraph. We are going to use the Observation-Interpretation-Application cycle to look at the entire book. We will see how a specific passage fits into the larger book from which it comes. To use a familiar cliché, you will be able to see the forest AND the trees. You will gain broader understandings of the themes of the book you are studying, the meaning of smaller portions of that book, and how the entire book and its smaller portions illuminate one another.

Here are the basic steps we will follow when using the Observation-Interpretation-Application cycle.

- Observation (We will follow these steps regardless of the size of the passage.)
 - Read the passage and make note of repeated ideas, phrases, and words.
 - Outline the book into smaller sections and identify how the sections fit together.
 - If you are making observations about the book as a whole, determine important background info from the text like author, recipients, summary, and purpose of the text.
 - If your passage only consists of one or two verses, most of your observations will be grammatical in nature, dealing with matters of parts of speech and sentence structure.

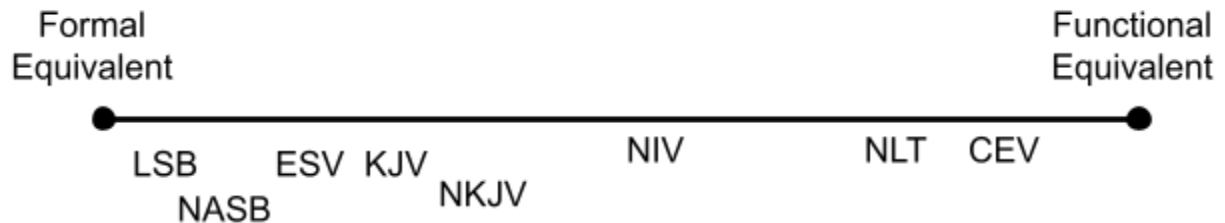
- Interpretation
 - Select one or more of your questions that arise from your observations.
 - Look for the answer in the immediate text around the source of the question and within the entire book.
 - Look for the answer in other parts of the Bible.
 - Consult other sources for information that will lead you to an answer.
 - Consolidate all your evidence and determine the answer.

- Application
 - Take the answer from your question in the Interpretation phase and determine the overarching principle at work
 - Determine how to apply that principle to your own life

Which Version or Translation Should I Use?

Let's take a moment to talk about Bible translations. It is impossible to take any language and do an exact, one-to-one, word for word translation into another. Whenever a translation committee undertakes the task of translating the Bible, they must make many important decisions regarding how to handle figures of speech, colloquialisms, and cultural practices that may have no meaning for the contemporary reader. How these situations are handled determines where the final work fits along the spectrum that has *formal equivalence* at one end

and *functional equivalence* at the other. Formal equivalent translations can be thought of as word-for-word translations. Functional equivalent translations focus on contemporary language patterns to communicate the meaning of phrases in the original text. Somewhere in the middle lies *dynamic equivalence* which strives to be thought-for-thought. The below graph shows where some of today's more popular translations fit along the spectrum.



All legitimate translations serve an important and vital function. What makes a translation legitimate? From a strictly practical perspective, it must be readable for you. Your reading style and comfort level with strict literal meanings versus thought-for-thought renderings will determine this. Has the translation stood the test of time? This factor is somewhat related to the readability of the translation. Some translations are so focused on reaching very specific groups of people that they overuse colloquialisms, slang, etc. and will quickly become out of date. Note, ALL translations will eventually become out of date because language is ever changing. Some will suffer that fate sooner than others.

A third consideration in choosing a translation is to read the preface of the translation. Was the translation performed by a legitimate group of scholars or someone who received a special revelation? Is this work a true translation from the original languages? What is the translation approach taken for this work? Are there any other immediate red flags that will immediately disqualify the work?

Finally, and the most important consideration when determining whether a translation is legitimate, is the translation faithful to the original text? "I don't know Hebrew or Greek. How am I supposed to know whether it is accurate or not?" you may be asking. One way you can discern the faithfulness of the text is to compare it to other translations. Has any part of the core message of the text been changed? Ask someone you trust about the reliability of the translation, especially if it is something new.

Now, which one should you use? A dynamic equivalent translation is useful when readability is more important. It can also be used to possibly clarify a more formal equivalent phrase that may feel a little more stilted or awkward. When studying the Bible, a formal equivalent translation is recommended. When approaching the Bible from a literal, historical-grammatical

approach, you want to be as close to the original text as possible. All sample materials that will be provided to you in this class will use the English Standard Version (ESV) translation of the Bible.

Homework

Over the next three weeks, you will learn how to complete a thorough survey of an entire book of the Bible. We will break this process into smaller portions, completing one part each week. We will use the book of *Philippians* to practice these skills.

This week, you are going to begin to get a feel for the important ideas of the book by listing the themes, ideas, words, and phrases that are repeated throughout the letter. You will also be looking in the text for important background information about the book.

Here are some guidelines to help you get started this week.

- Before you read, pray a simple prayer for understanding. “God, as I come to your Word, I pray you will open my mind to understand the truths it contains. Show me things I missed before and strengthen those which I already know. As I learn more about you, shape me to become more like you. Amen.”
- Read through the entire letter in one sitting. Or listen to it on your phone or computer. Or do both. Reflect on what it is saying.
- By Wednesday, you should have read through the entire book at least twice. As you are reading, make note if any of these questions can be answered from the text itself:
 - Who wrote this? Does the author identify himself?
 - Are the recipients identified?
 - Can we tell when this was written?
 - What appears to be the main point(s) or idea(s) of the book?
- After reading it completely at least twice, you can probably make a list of three to five themes, ideas, words, or phrases that repeat throughout the book. Jot those down. Read through the book again, this time adding the verses where they are found to your list. As you are doing this, you might discover there are other recurrences you did not readily identify in your initial list. Add those to your list.

Next week, bring the list of recurrences you find and the answers to the background information you found in the text.

This process may seem daunting at first, but it will soon become a habit for you. And even sooner, you will experience the joy of studying and understanding God’s Word.

Philippians

Chapter 1:1 Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus,

To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with the overseers and deacons:

2 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

3 I thank my God in all my remembrance of you,

4 always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy,

5 because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now.

6 And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.

7 It is right for me to feel this way about you all, because I hold you in my heart, for you are all partakers with me of grace, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel.

8 For God is my witness, how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus.

9 And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment,

10 so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ,

11 filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.

12 I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel,

13 so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ.

14 And most of the brothers, having become confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, are much more bold to speak the word without fear.

15 Some indeed preach Christ from envy and rivalry, but others from good will.

16 The latter do it out of love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel.

17 The former proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely but thinking to afflict me in my imprisonment.

18 What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed, and in that I rejoice.

Yes, and I will rejoice,

19 for I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance,

20 as it is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death.

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21 For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.

22 If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell.

23 I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better.

24 But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account.

25 Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all, for your progress and joy in the faith,

26 so that in me you may have ample cause to glory in Christ Jesus, because of my coming to you again.

27 Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel,

28 and not frightened in anything by your opponents. This is a clear sign to them of their destruction, but of your salvation, and that from God.

29 For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake,

30 engaged in the same conflict that you saw I had and now hear that I still have.

Chapter 2:1 So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy,

2 complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind.

3 Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.

4 Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.

5 Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus,

6 who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped,

7 but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.

8 And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

9 Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name,

10 so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth,

11 and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

12 Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling,

13 for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

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14 Do all things without grumbling or disputing,
15 that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world,
16 holding fast to the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I may be proud that I did not run in vain or labor in vain.
17 Even if I am to be poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrificial offering of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all.
18 Likewise you also should be glad and rejoice with me.
19 I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, so that I too may be cheered by news of you.
20 For I have no one like him, who will be genuinely concerned for your welfare.
21 For they all seek their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ.
22 But you know Timothy's proven worth, how as a son with a father he has served with me in the gospel.
23 I hope therefore to send him just as soon as I see how it will go with me,
24 and I trust in the Lord that shortly I myself will come also.
25 I have thought it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus my brother and fellow worker and fellow soldier, and your messenger and minister to my need,
26 for he has been longing for you all and has been distressed because you heard that he was ill.
27 Indeed he was ill, near to death. But God had mercy on him, and not only on him but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow.
28 I am the more eager to send him, therefore, that you may rejoice at seeing him again, and that I may be less anxious.
29 So receive him in the Lord with all joy, and honor such men,
30 for he nearly died for the work of Christ, risking his life to complete what was lacking in your service to me.

Chapter 3:1 Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things to you is no trouble to me and is safe for you.

2 Look out for the dogs, look out for the evildoers, look out for those who mutilate the flesh.
3 For we are the circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh—
4 though I myself have reason for confidence in the flesh also. If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more:

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5 circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews;
as to the law, a Pharisee;

6 as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless.

7 But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ.

8 Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.
For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain
Christ

9 and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which
comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith—

10 that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like
him in his death,

11 that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.

12 Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own,
because Christ Jesus has made me his own.

13 Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies
behind and straining forward to what lies ahead,

14 I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

15 Let those of us who are mature think this way, and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal
that also to you.

16 Only let us hold true to what we have attained.

17 Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you
have in us.

18 For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, walk as enemies of the
cross of Christ.

19 Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on
earthly things.

20 But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ,

21 who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even
to subject all things to himself.

Chapter 4:1 Therefore, my brothers, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm thus in the
Lord, my beloved.

2 I entreat Euodia and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord.

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3 Yes, I ask you also, true companion, help these women, who have labored side by side with me in the gospel together with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life.

4 Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice.

5 Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand;

6 do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.

7 And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

8 Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.

9 What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.

10 I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at length you have revived your concern for me. You were indeed concerned for me, but you had no opportunity.

11 Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content.

12 I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need.

13 I can do all things through him who strengthens me.

14 Yet it was kind of you to share my trouble.

15 And you Philippians yourselves know that in the beginning of the gospel, when I left Macedonia, no church entered into partnership with me in giving and receiving, except you only.

16 Even in Thessalonica you sent me help for my needs once and again.

17 Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that increases to your credit.

18 I have received full payment, and more. I am well supplied, having received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent, a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God.

19 And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.

20 To our God and Father be glory forever and ever. Amen.

21 Greet every saint in Christ Jesus. The brothers who are with me greet you.

22 All the saints greet you, especially those of Caesar's household.

23 The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.