

**Follow Jesus**  
**Habits for Personal Spiritual Growth**

**1. Introduction**

a. 1 Timothy 4:7

b. 2 Timothy 3:14-17

**3 Steps for Studying Your Bible**

**2. Observation – What does it say?**

a. Historical Context

- i. As you begin your study read the entire book and look for answers to these questions
  1. Who is the author?
  2. When did the author write?
  3. Where did the author write?
  4. Who was the book written to?
  5. Where did the original audience live?
  6. Why was it written? (Purpose/occasion for writing)

ii. The answers will help you reconstruct the world of the original audience so you can better understand what the book meant to them.

1. [www.thebibleproject.com](http://www.thebibleproject.com) is a great website to help you find out historical context

b. Comprehension – understanding the content of the book

i. Read the book in its entirety

1. For shorter, smaller books read it several times
2. Make note of recurring words, themes, ideas
3. Try to build your own outline of the book

ii. When you begin to study the book study one section at a time

iii. Pay attention to details

1. Look for repetition
2. Are there figures of speech, or symbolic language used?
3. What is revealed about the motives or emotions of those in the passage?
4. How are sentences constructed? Notice the pronouns, verb tenses, conjunctions
5. Are any cultural/background details given in the text?

iv. Read in multiple translations (Recommendation – ESV or CSB)

v. Look up words you do not know in a dictionary

vi. Be aware of preconceptions and your own theology

vii. Tools to assist comprehension:

1. Read your Bible daily. There is no substitute for consistent time in the Word.
2. Take notes
3. Underline, circle, highlight, etc.
  - a. To help copy and paste the book into a document, double-spaced with wide margins, and print it out
  - b. Use websites such as [www.biblegateway.com](http://www.biblegateway.com) to copy and paste entire chapters into a document you can print out
4. A good study Bible

### 3. Interpretation – What does it mean?

a. Steps for interpretation

i. Examine the text in its context

1. Context determines meaning for verses and passages
  
2. Meaning cannot be determined, usually, at the word or even verse level

ii. Pay attention to words and sentence structure

1. Is anything in the passage repeated?
2. Are there any quotes/references to the Old Testament? If so look them up!
3. Are there any conditional clauses (If/then), cause and effect, commands, etc.? Similes? Metaphors?
4. Ask why the passage is located here? Authors were not using

chapter and verses, but they wrote the things they did and put them in that specific spot for a reason.

5. How does this passage build off what was said in the previous section? How does it connect to next section?
6. Does this passage contain symbolism or figurative language?
7. Does it have a connecting word like “Therefore”?
8. Identify who all the pronouns are referring to.

iii. Interpret according to the type of book the author wrote – see Genre and Interpretation Guideline packet at end

iv. Look for theological principles

1. In other words, what is the author teaching in this specific passage?
2. What does the passage say about God?
3. What does it say about man?
4. What, if any, explicit commands are given?
5. What promises or warnings are given by God to man?
6. How does this passage point to Jesus?

v. Make conclusions about what the text means

b. Tools to help with Interpretation

i. Role of the Holy Spirit

1. John 14:26; John 16:13





- iii. Memorize verse/verses
- iv. Study in community
- v. Journal

## 5. Meditation

### a. Biblical Meditation

- i. Joshua 1:8; Psalm 1:1-3; Psalm 119:15; Psalm 145:5
- ii. Biblical meditation is – *“deep thinking on the truths and spiritual realities revealed in Scripture for the purposes of understanding, application, and prayer.” Donald Whitney*

### b. Purpose of Meditation

- i. Meditation brings focus to the passage and what God wants to teach you
- ii. Meditation helps lead to heart change
- iii. Meditation creates a bridge between studying Scripture and prayer
  - 1. *“While deep experiences of the presence and power of God can happen in innumerable ways, the ordinary way for going deeper spiritually into prayer is through meditation on Scripture” Tim Keller*
  - 2. *“The reason we come away so cold from reading the word is because we do not warm ourselves at the fire of meditation” Thomas Watson*

c. Practice of Meditation

- i. Select your passage/verse
- ii. Spend a few still moments before the Lord focusing on the passage/verse
- iii. Pray through the passage/verse
- iv. Read through the text in different ways
- v. Rewrite it in your own words
- vi. Use meditation as part of the Application step
- vii. Take your time
- viii. John Owen's 3 stages of meditation:
  1. Fixing the mind
  2. Inclining the heart
  3. Respond as the Holy Spirit leads

**6. Prayer**

- a. Followers of Jesus are to pray
  - i. Jesus prayed often – Mark 1:35; Luke 9:18; Luke 11:1; Hebrews 5:7
  - ii. We as his followers should too - Matthew 6:5-15; Luke 11:1-13; Colossians 4:2; 1 Thessalonians 5:17

b. How to pray

i. Lord's Prayer – Matthew 6:5-15

1. "Our Father in heaven" – pray with understanding of who God is
2. "hallowed be your name" – pray with understanding of God's nature
3. "Your kingdom come" – pray with understanding of God's work
4. "your will be done on earth as it is in heaven" – pray with understanding of God's plan/desires
5. "Give us this day our daily bread" – pray with understanding of God's provision and desire to give us good gifts
6. "forgive our debts" – pray with understanding of depth of our sin
7. "as we also have forgiven our debtors" – pray with understanding of need for right relationships with others
8. "lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil" – pray with understanding of the strength of our enemy AND the far superior strength of Jesus, who has already won the victory

ii. ACTS

1. Adoration – praise/adoration of God, for who He is and what He has done (Psalm 96)
2. Confession – confess your sins (1 John 1:9)
3. Thanksgiving – Thank God for the many blessings/gifts he provides (Psalm 100:4; Colossians 4:2)
4. Supplication – bring your requests to God, for you and for others (Phil. 4:6-7; Luke 11:5-13; Matthew 7:7-11; James 1:5-6)

iii. Practical tips

## Biblical Genres and Interpretation Guidelines

1. There are many different types/styles (genres) of books within the Bible
  - a. It is important to interpret and apply a passage according to the style of that particular book or passage
  - b. Each style has its own rules for interpretation.
  - c. This document will give you a high-level understanding of the interpretation rules for each genre found in the Bible
2. Types of Genres
  - a. Old Testament
    - i. Narrative – Genesis, Exodus, Numbers, Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings, 1 and 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, Daniel chapters 1-6
    - ii. Law – Parts of Exodus, Leviticus, Deuteronomy
    - iii. Poetry – Psalms
    - iv. Prophecy – Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi
    - v. Wisdom – Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon
  - b. New Testament
    - i. Narrative – Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Acts
    - ii. Letters – Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon, Hebrews, James, 1 and 2 Peter, 1-3 John, Jude
    - iii. Apocalyptic – Revelation, Daniel chapters 7-12 (could also considered prophecy)
3. Old Testament Genre
  - a. Narrative
    - i. Focus on the plot of that specific story
      1. What is the setting?
      2. Who are the characters?
      3. What problem/conflict appears in the story?
      4. Look for the climax of the story
        - a. This is where you will typically find the main point of the passage
      5. How is the conflict/problem resolved?
      6. Is there any following action after the resolution?
    - ii. Pay attention to the larger story. How does this connect to the larger narrative of the book?
      1. How does this story point forward towards Jesus?
    - iii. It is sometimes helpful to write out the answers to the questions above.
    - iv. Try to read familiar stories with “fresh eyes”
  - b. Law
    - i. Read and interpret Law through the lens of the New Testament

1. Jesus has fulfilled the Law and New Testament Christians are not bound by the Law
  - ii. Seek to understand the original context of the Law
    1. Why was it given? What was the original principle found in the law for Israel? What was the law's purpose?
    2. The answers to these questions will help you get to the theological principle
  - iii. Law was not given as a way to God or a way to salvation
    1. It was given to show Israel their sin and need for a savior
    2. Jesus is the one who fulfills the Law and brings salvation
    3. Ask how is this law putting a spotlight on sin? How does Jesus fulfill this?
  - iv. Remember the Law was not only about moral living
    1. All of the laws point to wholeness (whole/complete physically, spiritually, etc.) and holiness (becoming more like God)
    2. Wholeness and holiness come only through faith in Jesus
- c. Poetry
- i. Old Testament poetry uses a lot of figurative language that is not meant to be taken literally.
  - ii. In Psalms, the authors are not developing arguments to make a point about something
    1. Old Testament poetry is not typically making a doctrinal statement about something
    2. Psalms, for examples, are prayers or songs that are written with highly emotional language, they tend to describe how the author is feeling in a specific moment, and the feelings are best viewed as unfiltered coming directly from the author
  - iii. Pay attention to how the poetic passage is structured
    1. Poetry is not laid out in sentences; they are poetic lines grouped together
    2. Often the author will state something, and then restate it in the following line(s) in a different way – this is called Parallelism, see Psalm 19:1 for an example
    3. Typically, with the Psalms there is a complaint and a resolution. Sometimes the resolution comes in the same line, other times it comes later, but it does come.
  - iv. Important to note that the Psalms are organized in a specific way. When studying a Psalm be sure to read the one before and the one after.
  - v. Try to avoid looking for the key directive in the passage
    1. Focus on what the author is saying about God, man, life, sin, etc. and draw application from those things
  - vi. Remember that Old Testament poetry is often a prayer or a song, so pray through it or sing it.
- d. Prophecy

- i. When studying a prophetic passage, it is very important to know the prophet's main job was to enforce the laws of the Mosaic Covenant
  1. When reading through a passage, look for the accusations of sins the prophet is giving Israel
  2. How does the prophet describe Israel's sin? How are they specifically breaking the covenant?
  3. Prophets are essentially enforcers of the curses and blessings of the covenant laid out in Deuteronomy
    - a. To understand the Prophets better you will need to familiarize yourself with Deuteronomy
- ii. Historical context is important with prophecy
  1. Who is the prophet?
  2. Who is the prophet speaking to?
  3. What is happening historically/culturally?
- iii. Hebrew prophetic literature is unique
  1. In order to understand the prophetic book you are studying it is important to know how the prophets typically wrote – very unique compared to our Western, American way of writing
  2. Typically prophetic literature is recursive – meaning a topic is talked about and repeated often, and can be done in multiple different ways. So look for repetition of ideas
  3. Pay attention to the word “woe” and “therefore” – woe is used to identify sins of people/nations; therefore is used detail the divine punishment for those sins
  4. Typology: typology is the use of events, people, and places in the past that become a model or pattern for events, people, and places in the future.
    - a. A popular type in Hebrew prophecy is the exodus (God setting his people free from slavery in Egypt) – look for ways this type (or other types that are used) point forward
    - b. Ex. The exodus points forward to a greater exodus, which is Jesus setting us free from our sins, and then a more ultimate exodus when sin/evil is defeated fully and we spend eternity with Jesus in perfection
- iv. To interpret prophetic passages, follow the prophet's message
  1. How has Israel broken the covenant (how are they sinning against God)?
  2. What will happen if they do not repent and live in obedience?
  3. How does God continue to fulfill his promises to his people? How will God restore the damage this sin has caused?
- v. Bring the prophecy into the New Testament/New Covenant
  1. Has the prophecy been fulfilled?
  2. Is it an on-going fulfillment, awaiting final consummation?
  3. How does this prophetic message point to Jesus?

- e. Wisdom
  - i. Biblical wisdom literature is not made up of universal promises from God
    - 1. Biblical wisdom does not always follow that if you do one thing, then the outcome is guaranteed to happen
  - ii. Rather, Biblical wisdom is practical insights into godly living
    - 1. It is made up of wise sayings about how life normally works
    - 2. Wisdom literature does not account for every exception—life is situational and does not always play out in a normal way
    - 3. Still, Biblical wisdom gives good guidelines for believers as it approves what God approves and condemns what God condemns
  - iii. Wisdom books are Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon, and Job
    - 1. Know the historical context: author, occasion for writing, content of the book
  - iv. Focus on over-arching theological principles, and bring the practical advice found in wisdom literature into your current context
- 4. New Testament Genre
  - a. Narrative
    - i. New Testament narrative is mainly found in the Gospels and Acts
    - ii. Interpreting New Testament narrative is similar to Old Testament narrative
      - 1. Focus on the plot (setting, characters, climax, resolution, etc.)
      - 2. Look for how this particular story connects to its surrounding context
    - iii. With the Gospels, important to remember they are made up of stories from four different people with four different perspectives, and each has their own purpose for writing their particular Gospel
      - 1. This is why certain details/stories are in one Gospel and left out of another, or why the same story told in different Gospels sounds different
    - iv. Know the purpose and specific perspective of the author of that book
      - 1. For this, follow the steps to understand historical context
    - v. For Parables:
      - 1. Parables were given to help Jesus' followers better understand the Kingdom of God and what it means to live as a child of the Kingdom
      - 2. Parables tend to focus on one main idea/aspect of the kingdom
      - 3. A parable is typically a comparison of some aspect of the Kingdom with something of this world
      - 4. To understand parables, look for the idea, characteristic, attribute, etc., the parable is teaching and then think through how you are to live that out as a follower of Jesus
    - vi. Look for the theological principle in the narrative
  - b. Letters
    - i. New Testament letters are just that, letters—meant to be read in its

entirety in one sitting

1. When first studying a letter, read the entire letter, multiple times
  - ii. What is the historical context?
    1. Try your best to figure out why the author is writing this letter
    2. Follow the steps for understanding historical context
  - iii. Focus on paragraphs, meaning is not usually determined at the word or verse level, meaning is found at the paragraph level
    1. Ask why is the author writing about this particular subject/word?
    2. Look at what comes before and what comes after the section you are studying
  - iv. Pay attention to how sentences/paragraphs connect
    1. Look for the main point of the paragraph and build theological principle from there
    2. Look for key words like “therefore,” “but,” “so” to see how author is building the main point
- c. Apocalyptic
- i. What is the historical context?
    1. For Revelation, this comes in chapters 1-3. Important to remember who John is writing to and why.
    2. For Daniel, this comes in chapters 1-6
  - ii. Do not try to establish a strict timeline, this is not the purpose – apocalyptic literature is not following or trying to establish a timeline of the events the author is talking about
    1. This means things may be repeated in different ways or will be happening at the same time. Or something talked about later may actually come before.
  - iii. Purpose of apocalyptic literature was to give people currently suffering or facing persecution encouragement by giving a glimpse of the future
    1. Revelation reminds its audience that God is always in control and will bring ultimate defeat to all evil/sin
  - iv. Apocalyptic literature has a lot of figurative language and symbolism, which is not mean to be taken literally
    1. Beneficial to understand the symbols, but it is difficult so do not worry if you are unable to
    2. If a symbol is ever identified for you, pay close attention to it. For example, the kingdoms in some of the visions in Daniel.
  - v. Apocalyptic literature is always tied to our present circumstances
    1. It is not just a look into the future
    2. It is a look to the future that should encourage obedience to God in the present
    3. Look for the ways the author encourages obedience, usually found in the surrounding context
    4. This is where you will find the theological principles to draw application from