

# PART 3: HOW TO GET THE MOST OUT OF YOUR BIBLE

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## WARM-UP QUESTIONS

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1. What advice would you give to a fellow Christian who says they just don't understand the Bible?
2. What might be some goals you'd like to achieve when reading the Bible?
3. What might be some benefits to varying your Bible study methods?

## THREE SIMPLE STEPS FOR GETTING THE MOST OUT OF YOUR BIBLE

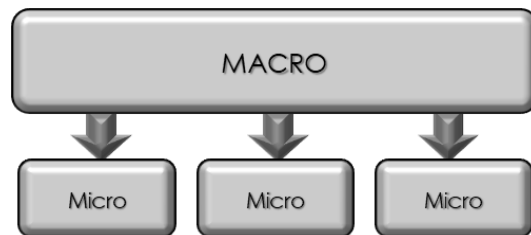
Jim George, a Christian author, reminds us that one of the noblest pursuits a child of God can embark upon is to get to know and understand God better. The best way we can accomplish this is to look carefully at the book He has written, the Bible, which communicates who He is and His plan for mankind. There are several ways we can study the Bible, but one of the most effective and simple approaches to reading and understanding God's Word involves the following three simple steps.



### Step #1: Observation ( \_\_\_\_\_ )

Look for the circumstances (who, when, why, where). Note: Many study Bibles present the circumstances just before the book itself. For example, what are the circumstances in Titus 1:1-5?

Look for the context. Do "macro before micro." Get the big picture (macro) of the book then drill down to the smaller points (micro). Look for the author's intended message (AIM)...the overall context of the entire book. When reading an individual passage within a Bible book, look for what precedes it, and what follows it. For



example, what is the overall context of the book of Acts? Hint: See Acts 1:8

Look for the structure. Many Bibles provide helpful book outlines. These will help you see the overall structure of a book.

Look for what is being emphasized by repetition or space. For example, notice what is being emphasized in 1 Corinthians 1:12; Chapter 13, Proverbs 31:10-31.

Look for relationships between ideas. Pay close attention, for example, to certain relationships that appear in the text. For example, notice the relationships of ideas in Psalm 50:15, 1 Corinthians 13:4-7, and 2 Peter 1:5-8.

Observation Exercise: What is James emphasizing most in James 2:14-26 below? Be careful to avoid interpreting this passage before observing.

*"What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? 15 If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, 16 and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and filled," without giving them the*

things needed for the body, what good is that? 17 So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. 18 But someone will say, "You have faith and I have works." Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. 19 You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe-- and shudder! 20 Do you want to be shown, you foolish person, that faith apart from works is useless? 21 Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar? 22 You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by his works; 23 and the Scripture was fulfilled that says, "Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness"-- and he was called a friend of God. 24 You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone. 25 And in the same way was not also Rahab the prostitute justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way? 26 For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead" (Jas. 2:14-26 ESV).

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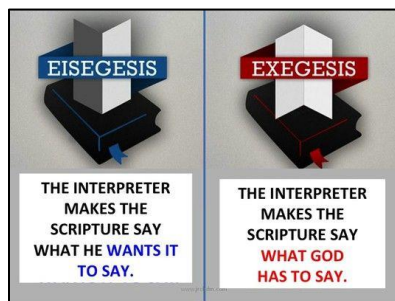


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## Step #2: Interpretation ( \_\_\_\_\_ )

Principle No. 1: A text cannot mean what it never could have meant to its readers. Be careful at this point in making certain that you don't read your interpretation into (eisegete) the passage (2 Peter 1:20).

- Exegesis is reading the author's meaning out of the text
- Eisegesis is reading into the text what you want it to say



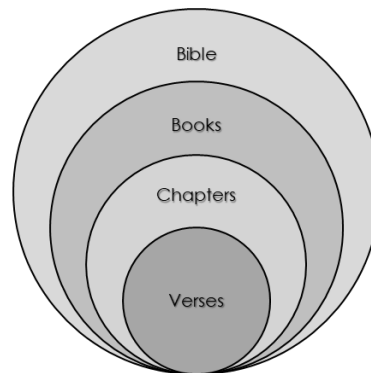
Avoid forcing your own meaning into the text. Whenever people have vastly different interpretations, it is usually because they are reading their meaning into the text (eisegesis) rather than reading the author's meaning out of the text (exegesis). Always exegete, avoid eisegeting!

Principle No. 2: Interpret according to the type of language being used. Is it literal or figurative language? Literal language means exactly what it says, while figurative language uses similes, metaphors, hyperbole, and personification to describe something often through comparison with something else. Is it prescriptive or descriptive language? Prescriptive language means "do it like this." Descriptive language means, "here's what they did at that time." For example, Solomon, a

man of God, had many wives. So, should Christian men today also have many wives? No, this is descriptive since the Bible speaks often of a husband having only one wife (Gen. 2:24; 26:10; 28:2; Eph. 5:31,33; 1 Tim. 3:2, 12; 5:9; Tit. 1:6; Rev. 21:9). Look for conditional promises ("if/then"). For example, in 1 John 4:15, "If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, (then) God lives in him and he in God."

Principle No. 3: Interpret according to the historical and cultural context. Remember, words change their meaning over time. For example, in 1 Thess. 4:15 the word "prevent" (KJV) meant to "go before." "Psaltery" in Daniel 3:5 (KJV, NAU) is not a salt factory; it is a harp. The word "dude" fifty years ago meant something different from the word today. "Don we now our gay apparel" can mean something entirely different today. In England calling a woman homely (home-loving) is a compliment. In India, calling a person an owl is an insult – in America, it means wise. Use study Bibles, commentaries, and Bible handbooks to gain an understanding of the cultural and historical context.

Principle No. 4: Interpret each passage in light of the Bible's teaching as a whole. For example in John 14:13-14, it says to ask for anything and you'll get it. By itself, this passage could be interpreted to mean "name it and claim it." In other words, ask God for anything and he'll give it to you. But in 1 John 5:14-15, it says we are to ask in accordance with God's will. James 5:16 says that the prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective. By itself, this might mean that our prayer is *always* powerful and effective; however, 1 Peter 3:7 says that a husband's prayers can be hindered by the way he treats his wife.



Principle No. 5: Correct interpretations will be consistently confirmed. When earnest believers interpret the Bible correctly, they will always find the consistent original meaning. Many small Bible study groups often end up exchanging different opinions about what a passage means because they haven't observed and interpreted it correctly. Having a Bible study with at least three others can make a big difference in discovering the correct interpretation.

Interpretation Exercise: How would you interpret James' statement about the relationship between faith and works (e.g. Jas. 2:17) against Paul's statement in Ephesians 2:8-9 and Titus 3:5? Which interpretation principles did you apply to this question?

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### Step #3: Application ( \_\_\_\_\_ )

Application is why we study the Bible. We want our lives to change; we want to be obedient to God and to grow more like Jesus Christ. After we have observed a passage and interpreted or understood it to the best of our ability, we must then apply its truth to our own life. You'll want to ask the following questions of every passage of Scripture you study:

- How does the truth revealed here affect my relationship with God?
- How does this truth affect my relationship with others?
- How does this truth affect me?
- How does this truth affect my response to the enemy, Satan?

Application Exercise: Based on your observation and interpretation exercises, how would you apply James 2:14-26 to your own life?

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### WHERE TO GET MORE INFORMATION:

Fee, Gordon D., and Douglas Stuart. *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981, 1993, 2003.

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