

A (VERY) SHORT GUIDE FOR STUDYING THE WORD¹

PRELIMINARY

- Pray
 - Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of your law (Ps 119:18)
- Do self-examination and watch for personal idols
- Settle the issue of authority

BASICS

- Study it systematically (read,² re-read, repeat)

A. What does it say?

Look carefully at:

The **characters, words, and phrases**

- People
- Dialogue — who is talking to whom?
- Setting (timeline and place) — does it change?
- Repeated words or themes or contrasts
- Transition words (i.e., but, therefore, for, so that, &c.)
- A truth, a command, a warning, a question
- Verbs – note past, present, future. Who is doing the action?
- Surprises
- Descriptions of God — Father, Son, Holy Spirit — or people
- Big Bible Words

The **whole passage**

- What kind of writing is this (e.g., narrative, poetry, &c.)?
- Who is writing to whom?
- Are there any clues why the author is writing this?
- What tone or feeling is the author trying to communicate?

The **structure of the passage**

- Divide the passage into its natural sections, one for each major thought
- Create a heading for each section
- Is there a key verse?
- What does the structure help you notice?
- What is the author's flow of thought?

¹ If you're reading with a friend, share your discoveries with each other after each major heading (A, B, C, D).

² How to decide what to read in the Bible is a topic requiring lengthier discussion, and outside the scope of this (very) short guide.

B. *What does it mean?*

Look at the context:³

- Read what comes immediately before and after
- Look up cross-references
- What is God doing in or behind the text?
- What function was it designed to serve? (i.e., why was it written?)
- Determine the Bad News (& its contemporary parallel); that is, what is the conflict in the text? (And what do we share in common with those to (or about) whom it was written?)
 - Fallen Condition
 - The mutual human condition that contemporary people share with those to or about whom the text was written that requires the grace of the passage for God's people to glorify and enjoy Him
 - The tendency toward temptation and evil (e.g., spiritual hardness, warring desires, fleshly fruit)
 - Finite Condition
 - Not every expression of our broken condition is because of moral evil. Sometimes people have need of God's provision simply because we are finite and must live with limits of knowledge, understanding, emotional capacity, physical ability
 - Fragile Condition
 - Sometimes people need God's provision, not because of a specific sin they have committed, but because they have been sinned against or have felt the effects of sin in general by circumstance of living in a fallen world
 - Faltering Condition
 - No non-Christian can be consistent to the logic of their presuppositions; there is a tension that exists in each person because non-Christian presuppositions simply do not fit into what God has made — in other Awords, a person falters between what they profess is true, and what actual living requires of truth (i.e., living inconsistently)

Pray

- Thank God for all He has already revealed to you; ask Him to help you see Him more clearly and love Him more deeply through the next steps of your study

³ A (slightly) longer version of this guide introduces helpful study tools, including commentaries, study Bibles, Bible dictionaries, lexicons and concordances, Bible atlases, other translations, and so forth.

C. What does it reveal about the gospel?

What do we learn about:

- Who God is?
- Who we are?
- What God has done/is doing/will do?
- How we are to make the gospel known?

Uncover the Good News

- What resolution to the Bad News is offered?
 - Predictive of the work of King Jesus
 - Preparatory for the work of King Jesus
 - Reflective of the work of King Jesus
 - What does this text reflect of God's nature that provides the ministry of King Jesus and/or human nature that requires the ministry of King Jesus
 - Resultant of the work of King Jesus

D. How do I respond to what God has revealed?

- In what way(s) is God calling you to respond?
 - What is one thing you are going to remember from this passage?
 - Pray, asking God to help you apply what you have learned
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- Memorize it
 - Meditate on it
 - Meditate in the sense of intellectually pondering the practical application of the text
 - Meditate in the sense of delighting in, cherishing, and resting deeply in the privileges and assurances of the text
 - Meditate in the sense of praising and worshipping God for what you discover about Him in the text
 - Obey it
 - Eagerly
 - Comprehensively
 - Openly