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# TEN WAYS TO READ THE BIBLE

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*Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of your law. —Psalm 119:18 ESV*

Would you like to get more from your Bible reading and study time? Perhaps you're new to the Bible and not sure where to begin? Perhaps you've been reading the Word for years yet still not comfortable with studying God's Word for yourself. It all begins with learning to really read the Scriptures.

## **There are three basic steps to studying God's Word:**

- **Observation** —what does the text say?
- **Interpretation**—what does the text mean?
- **Application**—how does it work?

Although many of us may be familiar with these steps, the tendency can be to quickly read a passage of Scripture and then jump right to application—tell me what to “do”! Perhaps we employ the “skimmer” method, skimming the passage looking for the “good stuff” that can help make sense of our situation.

In order to accurately interpret and apply the Bible, we must first do the hard work of observing—training ourselves to “see” what the text says.

*“Before you understand you have to see.” —Howard Hendricks*

On the next page are ten reading strategies you can use when studying the Bible to help you to slow down and spend more time observing so that you can rightly interpret and then apply the timeless truth contained in the passage.

Don't allow the list to overwhelm you! Try using just one new strategy at a time. Over time you will find your observation skills honed and you'll find you're “seeing” more in the text that you thought possible! Over time, you will find these strategies becoming habits in your Bible reading. Consider keeping a notebook or journal and recording your observations as you employ each reading strategy.

## TEN BIBLE READING STRATEGIES

### # 1 Read Patiently:

- Be patient with the text.
- Be patient with yourself.

### # 2 Read Prayerfully:

- Pray before, during, and after reading.
- When you're stuck on a passage or having trouble understanding it, stop and pray.
- Pray the Scriptures for yourself and for others.

### # 3 Read Repeatedly:

- Read it over and over and over and over...and just when you're tired of it, read it again.

### # 4 Read Imaginatively:

- Vary the Bible translation you normally read. Consider reading a paraphrase.
- Read it aloud.
- Listen to an audio version passage. The You Version and Dwell Bible apps will read a text to you.
- Rewrite the passage in your own words.

### # 5 Read Thoughtfully:

- Look for the structure of the passage. How has the author organized the content of the text?
- Print out the text and use to mark up as you read looking for repeated words/phrases, contrast and comparison, linking words/phrases, verbs, cause and effect and lists in the text.
- Ask questions of the text.

### # 6 Read Purposefully:

- Look for the aim of the author. Every word contributes to the intended meaning. Structure helps us see intent.
- Look for keywords and repeated words/phrases.
- Look for the purpose expressed through literary style: key people, key places, key events, key times, key ideas.
- Look for the purpose expressed through the grammar (more on this in future posts).

### # 7 Read Acquisitively:

- Look for creative ways to retain what you've read and "make the passage your own".
- Write a paraphrase.
- Draw the passage.
- Outline the passage.

### # 8 Read Selectively:

- Ask the "Big Six" questions and try to answer them from the text:
- **Who**—Who are the people in the text? What is said about the person or people? What does the person say?
- **What**—What is happening in the text? What are the events? What happens to the characters? What is the argument or point being made?
- **When**—When did the events in the text take place? When did they occur in relation to other events in Scripture? When was the writer writing?
- **Where**—Where is the narrative taking place? Where are the people in the story? Where are they coming from? Where are they going? Where is the writer? Where were the original readers of this text? If there is a journey taking place, trace it on a map.
- **Why**—Why is this included? Why is it placed here? Why does this follow that? Why does this person say that? There are an infinity of "why" questions.
- **Wherefore (So What?)**—What difference would it make if I were to apply this truth to my life?

### # 9 Read Telescopically:

- How do the parts relate to the whole of the passage?
- How does this book fit into the Old or New Testament?
- How does the book fit into the whole story of the Bible?
- Pay attention to context. Look at the historical context.

### # 10 Read Meditatively:

- Ponder, reflect, and think about the text throughout the day.
- There's a close connection between meditating on truth and applying it (Josh. 1:8, Prov. 23:7, Ps. 1:1-2, 119:97)