



HOW TO STUDY OR READ GOD'S WORD

"Study to show yourselves approved unto God. Workman needing not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth."

- 2 Timothy 2:15

How To Study or Read God's Word

I want to talk to you about how you study the Bible, how you study the Bible, because look, it's always been my objective to teach the Bible in such a way that it creates an appetite in your own heart to study the Scripture yourself. Not only do I want to create an appetite for the Word of God, but I want to display enough of the mechanics, enough of the art and science of Bible interpretation to whet your appetite and send you down a path that can allow you to flourish as a student of Scripture.

I've always said through the years that I want to be a second-generation teacher. I hope, that will deposit the truth in you so that you can pass it on to somebody else. I would be sad if you were the bucket and it all ended there. I would rather think of you as some kind of a channel, or some kind of a funnel. The Word of God comes into you and it flows out for someone else. Consequently, it's important to me not just to tell you what the Bible means, but to show you by explaining the context sort of one verse at a time to show you that the Bible means this, and make it obvious to you that it does so that you then aren't just pontificating about what the Bible means, but you're explaining it to somebody else with the same reasonableness that you heard it explained to you.

It would be easy, I think, for teachers – and many of them do that – to come to conclusions and just proclaim those conclusions, and announce those conclusions, and lay those conclusions out before people as if they had some kind of sort of ministerial authority to pontificate on truth without leading people through a process that makes that proclamation believable.

Effective Bible teaching at any level, whether it's in the pulpit or in a Bible study that you might attend with me or in somebody's home. Effective Bible teaching exposes a person to the flow of the text so that the proper interpretation becomes visible, and reasonable, and practical.

That's critical. And there's only one way that can really happen, and that is by studying. That's why the King James Version of 2 Timothy 2:15 is my favorite. "Study to show yourselves approved unto God. Workman needing not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the

word of truth.” There is before every believer – certainly those of us in ministry, but every believer – the responsibility to study the Word of God and be a craftsman of Scripture to get the meaning of it. God wrote it not to obscure anything, but to make everything clear. And there is a way that you can understand the meaning of Scripture. This is not only a good exercise for you; this is critical for you because this is your food. You don’t live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God. That’s a declaration of exposition. That’s a declaration of careful, thoughtful, chronological, systematic, verse-by-verse Bible study. Every word out of the mouth of God is profitable for you. It’s your food.

And if a Bible teacher has been faithful to the call, if a preacher has been faithful to the call, at the same time that he’s teaching people the truth, he’s doing two other things: giving them an appetite to know more, and giving them a hunger and a desire on their own to dig into Scripture and watch how it yields its truth. And in order to do that, you learn that there is a careful, thoughtful, systematic approach to understanding Scripture.

Now, I remember as a little kid, my grandmother had a little plastic box in the kitchen. And in it were about 300 Bible verses in any order you wanted them. You could shuffle them like a deck of cards. My first exposure to the Bible was that it was just a bunch of loose statements. Just a verse here and a verse there, and you could hang them together in any way you wanted. It took me a while to figure out the fact that this isn’t a collection of random verses; it can be assembled in any order you want. These are books that flow from beginning to end, and they flow reasonably and logically, and they unveil the truth when they’re carefully studied.

It requires a lot of diligence. It requires tremendous diligence. Go back with me for a moment to Proverbs. We learn a lot early in the book of Proverbs, a lot. The fear of the Lord, in verse 7, is the beginning of knowledge. You start with honoring God and having the fear of the Lord, not that you’re afraid of Him, but that you give Him due respect and honor. And then there is a call to listen to instruction and to see wisdom and knowledge and understanding. And then down in verse 20, it tells us that this is available. Wisdom shouts in the streets, lifts her voice in the square. And it goes on to say, “How long, O naïve ones, will you love being simple-minded? And scoffers delight themselves in scoffing, and fools hate knowledge? Turn to my reproof. Behold, I will pour out my spirit on you; I will make my words known to you.”

In other words, wisdom is personified here, really. This is God personifying wisdom and saying: how long are you going to live your life in ignorance when wisdom is available to you? It is available to you. Then, Proverbs goes on all through the whole book to lay out practical wisdom. We are told in dedicating ourselves to the Lord in Romans chapter 12 verses 1 and 2 that this is all about the renewing of our minds, renewing of our minds, changing the way we think. If anything is pure, and right, and just, and good, and holy, think on these things. Philippians 4:8. All Scripture is profitable for instruction, that the man of God may be thoroughly furnished or mature and equipped for every good work.

Scripture is just loaded with things like that. The Bible itself contains over 250 passages in the Old Testament, and I could discover between 50 and 60 in the New that require that you know the Scripture, understand what it says, and obey it. In Deuteronomy 5, we read this: “Oh that there were such an heart in them, that they would fear me.” That’s where it starts; the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. “And keep all of my commandments always, that it might be well with them, and with their children forever!” This is the path of blessing. That’s why our Lord said in Luke 11:28, “Blessed are they that hear the Word of God and keep it.” And you’ll remember Joshua 1:8. “This book of the law shall not depart out of your mouth, but you shall meditate therein day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written therein: then you will make your way prosperous, then you will have good success.” This is Joshua talking to the populous.

Psalms 119 has 176 verses that extoll the Scripture. The beginning, it says this: “Blessed are the undefiled in the way who walk in the law of The Lord. Blessed are they that keep His testimonies and seek Him with a whole heart.” A little later in that opening of Psalm 119, “Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed thereto according to Thy word. With my whole heart I have sought Thee: O let me not wander from Thy commandments, Thy word have I hid in my heart that I might not sin against Thee.” And on and on, the Bible calls us to the knowledge of Scripture.

So, this is not just for the preacher, or the teacher, or the theologian, the seminary professor, the author. This is for every believer. This is your food. Look, we’ve been doing this long enough at Grace Church that I am blessed to have a congregation of people who love the Word of God, who want to study the Word of God, who go in the bookstore and buy books,

and listen to preaching and teaching, and tap into other faithful Bible teachers and ministers around the world. I know that's in your heart.

It was said about Josiah the king in chapter 34 of 2 Chronicles and verse 31: "Then the king stood in his palace," in his place, "and made a covenant before the Lord to walk after the Lord, and to keep His commandments and His testimonies and His statutes with all his heart and with all his soul, to perform the words of the covenant written in this book." To know the book and to obey the book, to do what the book said. It was Ezra, chapter 7, a remarkable verse, verse 10: "For Ezra had set his heart to study the law of the Lord and to practice it, and teach His statutes and ordinances in Israel." Not enough to be a good listener of sermons. Not enough just to be a reader of books. You must be a student of Scripture.

Now, let me just with some very foundational things to think about. First, who? Who can effectively study Scripture? Who? First of all, it is required that you be a believer, a true believer. Turn to 1 Corinthians chapter 2, and I know you know these things. I'm just kind of pulling them together. I'm not going to keep you a long time. But, 1 Corinthians chapter 2 and verse 14. "A natural man," that's an unconverted man in his natural state, "does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised." He is spiritually dead; he can't discern spiritual truth.

If you have a problem, if you have someone who's not a Christian, who hasn't been transformed, who is functioning in the old nature – in sinful fallenness – and they apply themselves to the Bible, they will not come to the truth. In fact, it's shut out from them.

Go back to chapter 1 verse 21. "Since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not come to know God." The world through its wisdom did not come to know God. It can't. It's impossible. They are spiritually dead. They are spiritually blind. Who can know? Back to verse 10 chapter 2. "For to us God revealed them." That is, the things that God has prepared for those that love Him and are recorded in His Word. He revealed them through the Spirit. The Spirit is the one who searches all things, even the deep things of God. For who among men, as an analogy, knows the thoughts of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him. Even so, the thoughts of God, no one knows except the Spirit of God. Now,

we have received not spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may know the things freely given to us by God.

There are a lot of quote-unquote “scholars” in liberal institutions, universities, and graduate schools, seminaries who write books on the Bible and get it all wrong because they don’t meet this qualification of being regenerate and possessing the Holy Spirit. It is all darkness to them. They come up with the wrong conclusion.

What do we do with them? Do we make sure we get an education in their error? Let me give you a suggestion, Psalm 1. “How blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, nor stand in the path of sinners, nor sit in the seat of scoffers.” Don’t go to class with a scoffer as your professor.

Now, I’m not talking about temporal sciences and worldly subjects; I’m talking about things that relate to God and Scripture. You will be blessed if you don’t walk in the counsel of wicked people when it comes to the things of God. You will be blessed if you don’t stand in the path of sinners, and if you don’t sit in the seat where someone is scoffing against the Word of God. But your delight is in the law of the Lord. And in His law, He meditates day and night. What the psalmist is saying is: you don’t need scoffers to tell you lies; you just need to be in the Word of God. It’s where you need to be. You’ll be like a tree firmly planted by the streams of water which yields its fruit in its season, its leaf doesn’t wither, and whatever he does, he prospers.

So everything begins with regeneration, with new life. It was Martin Luther who said this: “Man is like a pillar of salt.” He’s like Lot’s wife. Yes, he’s like a log and a stone. He’s like a lifeless statute that uses neither eyes nor mouth, neither sense nor heart until he is regenerated by the Holy Spirit. Of course he has no access to the things of God.

Jesus said in John 8, “Because I tell you the truth, you don’t understand Me.” I understand that. I get that. I don’t expect accolades from unbelievers. I expect scorn and ridicule.

All right, there’s a second thing to think about. First of all, to be born again; secondly, to have a strong desire. This has to be a passion for you. Somewhere along the line – and I don’t really know why – somewhere in my youth, I began to be frustrated in reading the

Bible. I was fairly young, and the frustration came because I was always told to read the Bible. Read the Bible. My parents told me to read the Bible. My Sunday school teachers told me to read the Bible. Didn't reject the Bible, didn't reject the gospel. What frustrated me was that I didn't know what I was reading. I didn't understand what I was reading. The Bible is a great, big book, and if you're just reading it, it flies by pretty fast. I tend to have a very curious mind and a rather analytical approach to things. And the most frustrating thing that I could possibly do was just read the Bible and not understand what I was reading. It drove me crazy, and eventually I got so frustrated that I decided to slow the process down, or to figure out some way that I could read the Bible and understand what it meant. I don't know why God planted it in my heart. I don't know why He chose me, but it is that desire as a young kid that He planted in my heart that is still being fulfilled every single week of my life, and is why I do what I do now.

I read early on in my life about some student who wanted to learn from Socrates, and so he approached the learned Socrates and said, "Sir, I want you to be my teacher." And Socrates, according to this legend said, "Follow me," and walked out into the surf. He used to gather students around on the shore on the beach. He walked out into the surf and he got deeper, and deeper, and deeper, and deeper. And by now, the water is on the face of this would-be student, and Socrates puts both hands on his head and shoves him under and holds him there until he begins to thrash. And then he comes bursting out of the water, and he calms down a little bit, and stands still and with due respect. And he puts his hands on his head and shoves him under, does the same thing. He comes up again after a certain amount of minutes have gone by spouting and spewing. And Socrates says to him: "When you want to know the truth as much as you wanted to breathe, I'll be your teacher."

While that is an unforgettable lesson for him and probably for you as well, having heard the story, but there's something to be said for that. Through the years, even in my own life, the people that I have the most influence on as teachers are the people I can't get rid of. You know what I mean? They just don't go away. I mean, there are people that come and pass away and go this way and go that way. Hi it's nice to meet you, et cetera. There are people who come and never go. They never can get enough. They fill up my life because they have this strong desire.

How strong does that desire need to be? Let's move from Socrates to the apostle Peter. First Peter 2. "As babes desire the pure milk of the word." In the same way that a baby desires milk, you need to desire the Word. Now, what cultivates this desire? I really believe it's the teaching and preaching of the Word of God. It's more likely to happen here, generally speaking, although it certainly can happen in a church where the Word of God is not taught, and people just get completely frustrated by the absence of the Word of God, and they're a little bit like I was as a kid. They're looking at a Bible and nobody's helping them understand it. Nobody's explaining it to them; nobody's instructing them.

But I think when we do teach the Word of God faithfully, we tend to see that desire elevated. It flourishes.

Then I would say, thirdly, if you're going to be an effective student of the Bible, it requires diligence, diligence. The Scripture doesn't yield up its truths superficially. It doesn't yield them up easily. Do you remember Acts 17 and the noble Bereans who searched the Scripture to see whether these things were so? They were hearing preaching and teaching, these Jewish Bereans, and they went back to their own texts, back to their own Scriptures, and they searched the Scripture. And by the way, the word for search is the word used in the Greek language for a judicial investigation. You do a judicial investigation because a lot hangs in the balance. Life and death might hang in the balance. Justice hangs in the balance. That is why in 1 Timothy it says, "Elders that rule well are worthy of double honor, especially those that work hard in teaching and doctrine." Those who work hard – it's hard work. It is exceedingly hard work to mine out the truth of Scripture.

This is laid out in Proverbs, in chapter 2. But I want you to look at Job 28, which is kind of a parallel in terms of the idea. "Surely there is a mine for silver," Job 28. Job is talking about the comparison between searching for the wisdom of God and what men search for: treasure. "Surely there is a mine for silver and a place where they refine gold. Iron is taken from the dust and copper is smelted from rock. Man puts an end to darkness." What does that mean? He digs into the ground deeply, where it's always dark, until there's a shaft and light can come down. In other words, this is mining deep into the dark parts of the earth. "To the farthest limit, he searches out the rock in gloom and deep shadow. He sinks a shaft far from habitation, forgotten by the foot; they hang and swing to and fro far from men." This is how early mining was done. Men had the mechanisms, whatever they were in the ancient times,

in the patriarchal period when Job lived – to mine deep into rocks. By the way, you say: well, how could that be happening then when man – isn't man getting smarter and smarter? No. No, he's not getting smarter and smarter. There's no reason to believe that. Evil men are getting worse and worse and worse, and the effects of the fall are accumulating.

We have no idea the level of intelligence of ancient men. But they knew how to sink a shaft, they knew how to hang and swing to and fro to go deep down and mine the earth. From it comes food, and underneath it has turned up as fire. Did they have a way to use dynamite? Did they have some kind of means to break the rocks? "Its rocks are the sources of sapphires. Its dust contains gold. The path no bird of prey knows, nor has the falcon's eye caught sight of it." They're going to places that have never been seen by those that have the best vision. "The proud beasts have not trodden it, nor has the fierce lion passed over it. He puts his hand on the flint; he overturns the mountains at the base." What is he doing? Overturning a mountain. This is explosive power using a flint, fire. "He hews out channels through the rocks, and his eye sees anything precious. He dams up the streams from flowing, and what is hidden he brings out to light."

Look at the next verse. "But where can wisdom be found? And where is the place of understanding? Man doesn't know its value, nor is it found in the land of the living. The deep says, 'It's not in me;' the sea says, 'It's not with me.'" Where can he find wisdom? It's shut out for him.

But not to us. Not to us who work hard. Kopia, to labor to the point of sweat and exhaustion, who work hard to show ourselves approved unto God, workmen needing not to be ashamed.

So, if you want to be a student of the Bible, you need to be a believer of the regenerate Spirit and an indwelling Holy Spirit. You need to have a strong desire cultivated by the Holy Spirit and by the truth itself and your experience with it. You need to have an uncommon diligence. Look, the world is full of superficial preachers who go across the top of the Bible and pluck up ideas to attach to their theses and their themes and their subjects. But a real Bible teacher and a real Bible student goes down deep into the very text itself and lives with that text with diligent application until it yields its intended revelation.

A fourth element of being an effective Bible student is virtue, holiness. First Peter said, “Laying aside all evil,” kakia, “all evil.” All evil, all deceit. Let us desire the Word like babes desire milk, laying aside all evil.

I don’t think you can be an effective student of Scripture by bringing into your Bible study sin. It clouds your understanding. It darkens your mind. Listen to what James 1:21 says. “Therefore, putting aside all filthiness and all that remains of wickedness. In humility, receive the word.” Putting aside all filthiness, all that remains of wickedness in humility receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls, and then prove yourselves doers of the Word, and not merely hearers of it.

You have, 1 John 2:20 and 27, been given an anointing from God to be your teacher. That’s the Holy Spirit, which then means you need to be Spirit-filled. And to be Spirit-filled means you are not under the control of the flesh, you’re not under the control of sin, but you’re under the control of the Holy Spirit. Getting it right in Scripture is not a matter of being an elitist academic. Getting it right in Scripture is yielding to the Holy Spirit, walking in holiness, applying yourself with diligence and desire as a believer.

Then I think there’s one other thing that all of us who teach the Word of God sort of live in. That is dependent prayer. Paul, in Ephesians 1, says, “I do not cease giving thanks for you while making mention of you in my prayers.” What are you praying for? “That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him. I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of his inheritance and the saints, what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe.” I pray for you. I pray that God, the God of our Lord Jesus, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom, and revelation, and knowledge, and enlightenment so that you will know. You will know.

Now, now you’re ready to study the Bible. You’ve been redeemed and born again. The desire has been placed in your heart by the Holy Spirit and cultivated. You are willing to be diligent in your study of Scripture. You’re walking in obedience. You’re under the control of the Holy Spirit. You cried out to God for understanding. You’re ready to study Scripture.

Now, how do we do it? Let's go from the who to the how, OK? From the who to the how. What do we do? First, are you ready for this? Read the Bible. Yes. Read the Bible. Read through the Bible. There are all kinds of ways to do that. But this is how you begin to understand the Scripture: by reading it. It's not obscure, not complicated. If you go flying across the top of it too fast, you don't take the time and the thought to let it sink in. But if you read it regularly, consistently, and repeatedly, it's amazing how it begins to interpret itself.

I struggled with this when I first started to study the Bible. Early in my studies, I was reading the Bible but I was sort of forgetting what I read yesterday, forgetting what I read a couple days ago. So I decided there had to be a better way to do this. I said I'm going to try an experiment. I'm going to take 1 John, and I'm going to read 1 John every day. Five chapters, 25 minutes, 30 minutes if you kind of go slow and think about what you're reading.

So I did that. I said I'm going to do it for 30 days. And, by the end of the 30 days, I will have read this whole book, which is a consistent argument – circular kinds of arguments demonstrating who's a true believer by what that person believes and how that person behaves. That's the thesis of the book.

So, I just read it one day, read it another day, another day, another day. Many days I read it two times. Sometimes I read it three times. I finished month one, and I thought, wow, I understand what's in 1 John. I know what's in 1 John. In fact, if you asked me: where does it say, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness," I would say to you: 1 John chapter 1 verse 9 left-hand page, right-hand column, halfway down. Why? Because I visualized the Bible. I was reading it every day out of the same Bible.

End of month one, I decided to read it again. So I read it again. End of month two, I read it again. The book opened up to my understanding with no particular diligent study other than to take the full flow and argument of the book. 90 days, I knew what was in 1 John. It's been so embedded in me that I visualized that entire book in that original Bible that I read that I lost some years ago, but I'm still an alien in this book. This is a different Bible. I still, in my mind, see things in that original Bible that I had for so many years. Then I thought, well, John is probably pretty consistent in his writing and his emphasis, so let me do the

gospel of John. 21 chapters, I'll do 7 for a month, 7 for a month, 7 for a month, and I'll get through that. So, I did. I probably did it more than a month. I read the first seven chapters and I thought, oh, I get that. That corresponds to what's in 1 John. Oh, I understand that. That's explained in 1 John.

And eventually in three months, I had gone through the gospel of John. And now in six months, I knew John. And then I read the 2 John, 3 John repeatedly, then I jumped to Philippians, read that every day for a month, and eventually had a plan where I could get through the whole New Testament reading repetitiously.

And look, the Bible begins to interpret itself. It begins to interpret itself. It was said of John Wesley that he would rise at 4:00 in the morning every morning and read the Bible in five different languages. Somebody came to Donald Grey Barnhouse, the great Presbyterian preacher in Philadelphia, and said, "Dr. Barnhouse, I would give the world if I knew the Bible the way you do." He said, "Good, because that's exactly what it'll cost you." That's the first thing you do is read the Bible and you will be amazed at what it will yield. Second thing you do is interpret the Bible. You interpret the Bible. You don't read it like an aspirin tablet, like it was some kind of mystical upper or healer.

Do you remember Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch? We'll get to that in the eighth chapter of Acts. And Philip says to him, "Do you understand what you read?" And the Ethiopian eunuch says, "How can I, except someone guide me?" And you remember Nehemiah 8 when the great revival broke out, and they read the Scripture to the people all day long? And then they had men standing behind a great pulpit giving the sense of it. What does the Bible say? Yeah, we read it. What does it mean by what it says? This becomes rightly dividing the word of truth, or cutting it straight, like you were making some kind of a tent. Paul was a tent-maker. He had to cut the pieces – you women who sew, you have to cut the pieces, right, to get the whole garment to get come together correctly. And that's what you do with the Scripture. You interpret given passages and then you can make them come together in a coherent representation of biblical theology.

It all has to fit together. Jesus, you know, reprimanded the Jews in the Sermon on the Mount, and He kept saying to them, "You have heard it said. You have heard it said. You have

heard it said. But I say to you, but I say to you, but I say to you.” The world is full of bad interpretations.

Here’s a few. Since the patriarchs practiced polygamy, we should. Mormonism. Another one: since the Old Testament sanctioned the divine right of the King of Israel, all kings have divine rights. Here’s another one: because some Old Testament plagues and diseases were from God, we should avoid sanitation and vaccination. Here’s another one: because the Old Testament teaches that women are to suffer in childbirth, you should never give your wife any relief for pain in her giving birth. Any women want to vote for that one? Pretty ridiculous.

I remember hearing a series years ago of a guy who preached on Jericho, and it was a sermon that he gave to young people who were courting someone, and he suggested that if you marched around the girl seven times and blew a trumpet, the walls of her heart would fall down. Huh, really.

There was another sermon series, a rather sophisticated sermon series – I listened to all of it – on the book of Nehemiah where everything in the story of Nehemiah and the rebuilding of the wall and all of that corresponded to some spiritual thing. The story of Nehemiah was, basically, that the Holy Spirit wants to rebuild the broken walls of your human personality, and he wants to build you up again. And everything had a significance. The pool in the middle represented the baptism of the Holy Spirit, and the mortar between the bricks was speaking in tongues, and it was crazy things.

You can’t do that. You can’t spiritualize. A lot of people do that in the Old Testament. I call that Little Bo Peep preaching. You don’t need a Bible story. You can make one up. You could preach Little Bo Peep lost her sheep. She was little. She was nothing. She had only a few sheep. She lost her sheep. You may feel like you’re nothing, that you’ve lost what you have that is so meager to start with. Meh. It’s nonsense.

So, sound interpretation is critical. Where I could say more about that as you can probably guess, but I will leave it at that.

In order to make a sound interpretation, you have to close some gaps. Okay? A language gap. You're dealing with Greek and Hebrew and sometimes Aramaic. A culture gap. You're dealing with customs with which we are completely unfamiliar. How are you going to close that gap? You're talking about a society that goes all the way back to Moses, all the way back to the patriarchs, all the way back to Abraham. Fortunately, we are blessed to have lots of historic resources to help us close that culture gap. There's even a geographical gap. We're reading in the Bible about certain things, certain places Jesus is going. We wonder how he could get there that quick or why it took so long. Or Old Testament features that have geographical significance. That's all very, very important. Those gaps have to be closed.

There's a history gap. What I mean by the history gap is you've got to find the plot that's behind the text. John wrote what he wrote because there was a corresponding plot coming from people denying the truth of the gospel and the true deity of Christ, and the true humanity of Christ. That's critical background. As interpreters, we have to close those gaps – the language gaps, the culture gap, geography gap, history gap. That's part of the hard work of what we do.

You can do that on your own. You can get a Bible dictionary, which you ought to get. Get a copy of The Treasury of Scripture Knowledge, T-S-K, which will help you use the Bible to interpret the Bible. Get a concordance. A concordance is simply a place where you can find all the verses in the Bible listed under subject.

What do you do about culture? There are lots of wonderful books on historic culture, biblical, historic culture. Many books. You can get a good Bible atlas. You can read history. You don't know what's going on in the trial of Jesus if you don't know the history of Pilate, for example.

In the end, you're looking for the literal interpretation, okay? The literal, natural, normal sense of the passage. Nothing hidden, nothing secret, nothing allegorical, nothing mystical. This is real history, real grammar, real people. And even when you're dealing with apocalyptic literature such as the visions of Daniel and Ezekiel and the book of Revelation, you're still dealing with actual fact to come to pass in the future that is represented in

symbols. Even the book of Revelation, you should be able to understand because it starts by saying, “Blessed is the one who reads and understands this book.”

I would throw in just a couple of other things. Meditate on the Bible. Sometimes people say to me, “Where do you come up with this stuff that you teach?” My answer is: I think about it. I think about it. I just sit and think about it. I don’t use a computer, which slows me down to a crawl. But slow is good because meditation is critical.

Listen to Deuteronomy 6 again. “These words which I command thee this day shall be in your heart. Teach them diligently to your children. Talk of them when you sit in the house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, when you rise up. Bind them for a sign upon your hand, frontlets before your eyes, and write them on the posts of your house and on your gates.” Literally saturate your environment with divine truth. Meditate on it. Blessed is the man, we just read it, Psalm 1, that doesn’t walk in the counsel of the ungodly, doesn’t stand in the path of sinners, doesn’t sit in the seat of scoffers, but is delighted in the law – is in the law of the Lord. And in that law, he does what? Meditates day and night. Think about it. The word “meditate” pictures a cow chewing her cud, just gnawing away on it.

Now, if you want to effectively know the Word of God, you’ve got to meditate. You need to be born again. You need to have a strong desire. All of those things we’ve talked about. But to get the meaning, you have to think about the texts. You have an illuminated mind, and that’s where the Holy Spirit does His work. Slow the process down.

Then I want to add one final thing. To really be effective in garnering the discipline of working to the meaning of Scripture, you need to teach the Bible. You need to teach. The best way to learn is to give it away. Because now, now you have to get it right, because somebody else’s life is at stake. And now, there are going to be people dependent on you. When the Word of Christ dwells in you richly, you become a priceless treasure to those around you. Teach the Bible.

I’ve told people throughout my life that what you give away, you never lose; what you keep, you lose. I can just tell you that my theology and the things I know about Scripture that are embedded in my mind, that are there all the time for instant recall, are the direct product of my teaching. Why? Because in order to teach it effectively, you have to understand it.

Sometimes you hear people say, “Well, I listened to a certain speaker but he was way over my head.” I couldn’t follow him. It was way over my head. You know what the problem with him was? He didn’t know what he was talking about. That wasn’t over your head; that was just an illustration of somebody who didn’t understand the subject. The reason you don’t understand it? He didn’t understand it. He hadn’t refined it enough to get it in his own mind, to make it clear to you. In order to teach, you’ve got to get it where you make it clear to somebody else. The responsibility to teach is the key to being an effective student of Scripture.

You say well, “I don’t feel I’m called to be a teacher.” Yes, you are. You just may have a small class. The things you’ve heard from faithful men – what do you do? Pass on. Second Timothy 2:2. We all have that same responsibility.