

# READING THE BIBLE

Reading the Bible is essential to faith and study. However, the Bible can also be one of the more difficult genres to understand. The difference in time and culture alone poses a challenge to readers in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. This handout gives strategies to help you consider a scripture passage in light of its history, its intended purpose, and its impact today.

Try using websites like [blueletterbible.org](http://blueletterbible.org) and [biblehub.com](http://biblehub.com) to research any unfamiliar words or ideas! Those sites allow for word studies in the original Greek and Hebrew languages.

## FOUR STEPS OF THE PROCESS

- 1. Overview and Preview** – Start laying a firm foundation for yourself before you even begin reading.
  - Research and consider the historical context of the passage and review anything you already know about the author, the audience, and the genre of writing.
- 2. Read the Passage** – Depending on the length of the passage, try to read it straight through. If it is more than a couple chapters, pause occasionally to review what you know so far.
  - Make small notations as you go. For example, put question marks by words or ideas you do not understand. Underline places that strike you as meaningful and highlight places that seem to emphasize God’s vision.
- 3. Ask Yourself Questions** – After your first read through, ask yourself questions about the passage.
  - Talking aloud about the content will help you understand the passage more and remember it better. Depending on your learning style, you could also try writing down your thoughts.
  - Revisit the notes you made, especially the question marks. Do outside research to learn about what you did not understand.
  - Think through the verses you found interesting.
- 4. Read the Passage Again and Consider Application** - Read through the passage again with an eye open for the passage’s meaning for your life.
  - Self-application should take place last in your reading process. Richards and Bredfeldt (1998) suggest finishing with the question, “What must I change?” (p. 64). What would living well look like in response to what you have read?

## QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF

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Since reading is a metacognitive activity where you need to consider what you are thinking about and how you are thinking, the key to meaningful absorption is to ask yourself questions as you read. Below are some ideas for questions to ask before and after reading a passage of scripture.

### 1. Before Reading: Overview and Preview

- a. What type of writing is this passage? (For example: poetry, song, story, letter, law, guidance, history, prophecy, etc.)
- b. Who wrote this passage?
- c. Who was the author's intended audience at the time of writing?
- d. What was life like for that audience?
- e. What did the original audience believe about God, and how did they relate to him?
- f. Looking at the titles and headings, what do you think this passage will be about?
- g. What do you already know or believe about this topic?

### 2. After Your First Read-Through

- a. What happened in the passage?
- b. Who were the prominent characters in the passage, and what were their motivations?
- c. How do you think the audience would have felt and responded to this passage?
- d. Were there vocabulary words you did not know? If so, take a moment to research.
- e. What were the significant details of the passage?
- f. How would you sum up the main point of the passage in one sentence?
- g. How did the passage portray God?
- h. How did the passage portray humanity?

### 3. After Your Second Read-Through

- a. With your focus on application, consider the main point of the passage in light of these questions posed by Richards and Bredfeldt (1998):
  - i. "What does it [the passage] say?"
  - ii. "What does it mean?"
  - iii. What is the main point of the passage?
  - iv. How does the main idea of the passage propose change to the way humanity currently lives and believes?
  - v. What does it look like for *you* to love God and others well in light of what you have read? (p. 64).

#### References

Richards, L. O. & Bredfeldt, G. J. (1998). *Creative Bible Teaching*. Moody Publishers.

**PRACTICE NOW**