

Decide—What difference does it make that I have read this?

- ✓ Hold loosely the desire for “something to do.”
 - ✓ The most appropriate response might be a change of desire or affections, or simply to be overwhelmed by God.
 - ✓ With narratives you might begin with, “Now that I know this about Jesus, what might change in my life with Him?”
 - ✓ With instructions you might begin with, “What does this say about how I get to participate in what God is doing?”
 - ✓ With poetry you might begin with, “How does this make me feel toward God,” or “what does this say about how God feels toward His people?”
 - ✓ Good application questions are specific to the passage and flow directly from the authors’ main point in each passage.
- When you are ready to move on in your study, begin looking for connections between the passage and the context surrounding it.

Some kinds of questions that you do **not** need to ask:

- ⊗ “What principle is there to follow?”
That kind of question implies that the passage is about you and what you do *for* Jesus. Look instead for what the text says about living life *with* Jesus.
- ⊗ “What sin is mentioned that I need to repent of?”
That kind of question sends you looking for something that might not be in the passage and distracts you from seeing what is actually there.

This guide is based on *Reading Scripture* and *Spreading the Word*, both by Brian Onken, director of The River. The River is a Biblical equipping center in Upstate South Carolina. Learn more at www.theriverupstate.org/course-overview/course-schedule/

A Reader’s Guide to Digging Up Treasure in the Bible

To understand the Bible for ourselves we must be both dependent on the Holy Spirit *and* attentive to the words in the text (II Timothy 2:7). The Spirit will give us understanding as we pay attention to the words. This guide is designed to help you become a good reader of Scripture by making you more attentive.

This is not a new method, but simply recognizes the natural process we innately use when reading other things, and applies that process to reading the Bible. Think about the process with the acronym **READ**.

Recognize

Examine

Analyze

Decide

Recognize—What am I reading? (narrative, poetry or instruction)

- There is no spiritual way to read the Bible. Read according to the genre being used (as we do with everything else).
 - ✓ Narrative—recounts real events by describing a “slice of life” (Read by mentally entering the action).
 - ✓ Poetical (including parables)—paints word pictures and/or expresses emotion (Read to see the picture or feel the passion).
 - ✓ Instructional—presents ideas and truths in progressive development (Read by tracking the author’s reasoning and flow of thought).
- Once you’ve recognized what you’re reading, then . . .

Examine—What does it say?

- The objective at this stage is to carefully notice the words in the text and gather observations.
- ✓ That deserves much more attention than we usually give.
- ✓ Hold loosely what you know or think you know about the passage.

So ask:

- ✓ If I had only this passage before me, what would get my attention? What words are used? Are there repeated words, emphasized words or intense words?
 - ✓ If I had never read this passage before, what would I notice? Are there surprising or unexpected words? Would I have used these words?
 - ✓ After reading a second or third time, what do I notice that I might have missed earlier?
- Before proceeding, make sure you have noticed all pieces of the passage. Next, connect those pieces in order to discover the authors' intent.

Analyze—What does it mean?

- The objective at this stage is to answer the question, “Why did the author write this passage?”
 - ✓ Hold loosely the desire to draw conclusions before reading the text well.
 - ✓ The narratives recount real events in a certain time and culture. Make sense of how people behaved in the events by considering the circumstances that shaped their thinking. Almost all of that information is in the text.
- To get the meaning, ask questions appropriate to the genre you are reading, using the examples that follow. (For all genres, other questions specific to the passage can help a lot).

For narratives, ask:

- ✓ Based on the authors' description, what would a person in the event have heard, seen and thought?
- ✓ What could the key people in the event have done or said differently?
- ✓ Why might the author have included the details of the event as he did? How could he have recorded it differently?
- ✓ If the account is of a miracle by Jesus, did He need to do it *that way* in order to perform it?
- ✓ What does this account tell me about how Jesus does things and what He is like?

For parables:

- ✓ A parable is a thematically driven story that makes a single point in a memorable way.
- ✓ A parable is like a joke. It has an obvious “punch line” for the reader to get.
- ✓ So, for parables, begin by asking, ““If I were *not* reading this in a Biblical context, what point would I get?””

For instructional passages:

- ✓ Remember that they were not originally written to you. Seek first to make sense of them the way the original audience might have understood them.
 - ✓ Pay attention to connecting words such as “so,” “for,” and “therefore.” Find out what they are there for.
- When you have a sense of the authors' point in the passage, then . . .