

English Transcript

How to Study the Bible

Lesson 2: 10 Tools to Help with Studying the Bible

Welcome back to How to Study the Bible. We will continue on page 12 of your handout as we discuss Lesson 2: Ten Tools to help with Studying the Bible.

This lesson incorporates a summary of what is presented in more detail in a wonderful book, *Dig Deeper: Tools for Understanding God's Word* by Nigel Beynon and Andrew Sach.

1. The Author's Purpose Tool

It sounds obvious, but the Bible authors wrote their books with a particular purpose in mind. They were not just writing random thoughts that came into their minds. These purpose statements are often included in their writing.

For example, read John 20:30-31 and summarize what John's purpose was for writing his gospel.

Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples which are not recorded in this book, but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

In this course we will study the book of 1 John. This book contains several "tests" by which you can determine whether your faith is genuine. John includes four purpose statements for writing this book. Look up the references and write them in the box below. Summarize the purpose statements in your own words.

1 John 1:4	We write this to make your/our joy complete ...
1 John 2:1	I write this to you, so that you don not sin, but if you do sin, we have an advocate with the Father,
1 John 2:26-27	I am writing these things to you about those who are trying to lead you astray ... you have an anointing ... remain in him.
1 John 5:13	I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know you have eternal life.

Here are a few questions to discover the author's purpose for a book if a clear statement is lacking:

- Who is writing and to whom? Date? Place? Occasion? Purpose?
- What is the situation of the author and of the readers?
- Are we made aware of any problems that need to be resolved or addressed?
- Are there any repeated themes or a single idea that holds everything together?

Look at 2 Timothy as an example of a book that lacks a clear purpose statement. I will summarize the story line, but the Scripture references are provided in your handout for you to look up on your own.

Paul is writing to Timothy, with whom he has a close relationship (1:1-7). Paul is an apostle, a commissioned spokesperson for Christ (1:1, 11). As a result of his gospel preaching, he has suffered greatly (1:11-12; 3:10-11). He is in prison (1:8) and has been deserted by many (1:15; 4:14-16). He thinks he is about to die (4:6-8).

Timothy is a church leader (1:6; 2:2, 14). There are false teachers in his church who are distorting the true gospel (2:14-18, 22-26; 3:1-10, 13). Worse still, some in the church are eager to hear these false ideas (4:3-4).

Paul spends most of his time encouraging Timothy to stand for the true gospel (1:8, 13-14), to teach it himself and train others to teach it also (2:2, 15; 3:14-17). He warns Timothy of the false teachers and instructs him how to deal with them (2:14-26; 3:1-10). He tells Timothy throughout that he must endure suffering (1:8; 2:3-13; 3:10-12). He continually reminds Timothy of the future – both the reward of heaven (1:1, 10; 2:10; 4:8) and the sobering reality of judgment (2:12-13; 4:1).

Putting it all together, our detective work suggests that Paul's purpose in writing to Timothy is to urge him to continue to stand for the true gospel despite the suffering that it will bring, in light of the glorious future that awaits him.

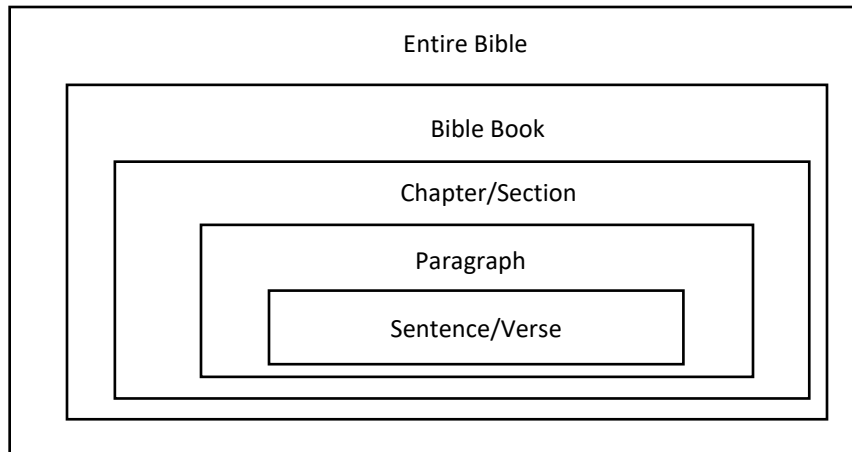
I might summarize the author's purpose statement in this way ...

"Timothy, stick with the gospel. The same old gospel. Keep teaching it, even though people on your church don't always want to hear it, even though it's going to mean suffering and hardship. This is the gospel, Timothy – God has saved us! Not because of what we have done, but because of his grace! Jesus has defeated death, Timothy! Life and immortality are ahead of us. Isn't it fantastic! Isn't it worth suffering for?"

2. The Context Tool

What is the difference between the way you read a novel compared with reading an encyclopedia? The answer is obvious. You would approach each with a different strategy.

There are different levels of context from a sentence (verse) to a paragraph, within a chapter, book and then the entire Bible.



Examples of other passages often used out of context:

Jer 29:11

Matt 18:19-20

1 Cor 13:4-8

John 6 "eat flesh/drink blood"

James 2 "faith + works"

Here are two examples of understanding a passage based on the proper context.

Example 1: Exodus 20:3 says, "You shall have no other gods before me." This is the first of the Ten Commandments. If we read this and the nine others that follow it on their own, we might conclude that you become one of God's people by being good enough by keeping all the rules. But if we read one verse earlier: "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me" (Exodus 20:2-3). God gives the commandments to His people that He has already saved from Egypt. God is saying this is how you are to live now that I have saved you. The truth is that relationship with God was never based on works. Relationship with God is always initiated by God and motivated by His love. We are called to respond to His invitation and be saved by grace through faith (Eph 2:8-9).

Example 2: If you read 2 Samuel 13-18 you might have great sorrow for David and his family (David's son Amnon rapes his half-sister, Tamar. David's son Absalom murders his half-brother Amnon. King David weeps. Absalom attempts to overthrow his father as king. David flees for his life. David's army defeats the rebellion of Absalom and he dies in battle. As you read all of this you might have great sympathy for David and his family. To understand the context of these chapters, you must look at 2 Samuel 11-12. We see that all the tragedy in these chapters is the result of David's sin.

2 Samuel tells us that sin does matter. There are real consequences for sin. It destroys relationships. It is not worth any immediate gratification. This is relevant in our study of 1 John. There were many false teachers who taught that the Jesus did not come in the flesh. The spiritual realm is all that matters because the flesh is evil. It does not matter what you choose to do with

your body. The Scriptures teach us that all sin has consequences and that we are called to honor God with our bodies, our minds, our words, our entire being.

In our 1 John study, it will be important to understand the context of the false teachers and the heresies they were spreading at the time when John was writing this letter. This will make it more clear why John includes what he does in this letter

3. The Structure Tool

A good place to start your study is to subdivide a passage of Scripture into smaller sections. We want to keep the big picture in mind, otherwise we just end up with a bunch of isolated verses or passages. The key to looking at the parts without losing sight of the whole is to pay attention to the structure of the passage by asking two questions:

How has the author broken down his material into sections?

How do these sections fit together?

We can use the Structure tool to divide up an entire book of the Bible into a few major sections or divide a small section into smaller units. You might want to limit your sections to 3-6. If you get much bigger than that it becomes too complex. There is no full proof way to divide these sections. By reading and re-reading the book or passage, you will begin to see the way the author has organized his thoughts. It is helpful to give each section a title with a summary statement explaining the section.

Example of a Book Structure: Some have called Isaiah the mini-Bible with chapters 1-39 representing the 39 books of the Old Testament presenting our need for a Savior. Chapters 40-66 represent the 27 books of the New Testament with the presentation of the promised Messiah, the Suffering Servant, as the One who will come to redeem us.

Another example might be Paul's letter to the Ephesians. There are six chapters. We notice that chapters 1-3 have a doctrinal tone and chapters 4-6 are much more practical and life oriented. We discover that Chapter 4:1 is the pivot point in the book. This verse says, "As a prisoner for the Lord, I urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the gospel." The Greek word for "worthy" is "axios". This word can mean "balanced". Think of an old-fashioned scale with two plates on either are of the scale that would be used to weigh fruit, gold or silver. What the Apostle Paul is saying to the Ephesians is that they should walk or live their life as followers of Jesus in a balanced manner. What they believe about Jesus and what He has done for them (this is chapters 1-3) must be in balance with how God calls them to live by His grace (this is chapters 4-6). What we believe should match how we behave. Our creed must match our conduct. Having this general overview of the structure of the letter will help to guide your deeper study.

With Structure we should also pay attention to the grammar in the text. What is the subject, the verb, the object in a sentence? What are the tenses of the verbs? Consider the body of thought in a paragraph which is composed of various sentences. God communicates His ideas in sentences with paragraphs. Another tool, Linking Words, is also part of the Structure. What are the cause and effects, comparisons, and contrasts in the text? How are various thoughts emphasized through repetition or other grammatical tools?

In our 1 John study, you will notice at least three major themes in the letter and a series of cycles where these themes are repeated throughout the letter. One purpose of 1 John is that the reader can know they have eternal life. The apostle John repeats three tests for genuine faith throughout the 5 chapters of 1 John.

Doctrine Test (Belief);
Moral Test (Obedience);
Social Test (Love)

Listen of the repetition of words related to what one believes about Jesus, the obedient life, and love.

4. Linking Words Tool

(e.g. Acts 1:8 “but”)

Word like “if”, “since”, “consequently”, “for this reason”, “therefore”, “because”, “so that”, are all examples of linking words. These words help us make sense of the flow of an argument in a passage and reveal cause and effect relationships between different statements. Someone once said, “If you see the word ‘therefore’, always ask what it is there for.”

The word “therefore”, links what comes before the word and is the reason for whatever comes next (usually the result or consequence that flows from it).

The use of the word “for”, usually links in the opposite direction. The result or desire outcome comes before the “for” and what follows is the reason or context for that result.

Let’s look at some examples.

Consider Romans 12:1-2

I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

Our word “therefore” in 12:1 causes us to look back to what was stated in the prior verses. We read about God’s greatness and mercy in Romans 11:33-36.

Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! “For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?” “Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?” For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.

In view of God’s greatness and mercy, therefore, we are called to offer our bodies as a living sacrifice.

Here is an example of the use of the word “for” and we can see how the result or outcome comes before the use of the word and what comes after the word is the reason or context for that result. Consider the familiar passage of John 3:16

“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

The result of Jesus offering up his life is linked to the context of verses 14-15 where John writes the following.

¹⁴ And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, ¹⁵ that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

We are called to open our eyes and see the connection between God giving his Son as a sacrifice of atonement for sin and our need to look to the Son, believe, and receive eternal life.

There are other words that function similar to the word “therefore”, such as “consequently”, “for this reason”, and “thus”, that link a statement to what comes next.

Words similar to “for”, such as “because”, “since”, and “so”, will help us see the linkage to what comes before the statement.

The key point with linking words is to make note of the logical connections in a passage.

Other linking words to look for:

“If/then” highlights conditional statements.

“So that” identifies a purpose statement.

“But” always signals that a contrast or comparison is being made.

You will see several linking words in our study of 1 John (“if/then”, “so that”, “but”, “this is how we know”, ..., etc.). These words and phrases will be helpful in your search to understand the true meaning of any Bible passage.

5. Vocabulary Tool

The Bible is filled with words with very specific meanings as well as common, everyday meaning.

Examples of technical terms in the Bible: Redemption, Atonement, Propitiation, Reconciliation, Sanctification, Justification, etc. Bible dictionaries are helpful to gain a deeper understanding of these more technical terms. You can also look in a concordance to see how a specific word is used in other places throughout the bible to better understand it's meaning in the passage you are studying.

There are also examples of familiar words that can take on different meanings depending on the context. For example, in his letter to Titus, Paul speaks of the "hope of eternal life" (Titus 1:2). The common use of the word "hope" means something we would like to see happen, though we have no certainty that it will happen. Paul means something different. Eternal life is promised by God. Since God does not lie, there is no doubt about this hope. It is certain.

The main point for our study of any passage or book of the Bible is the importance of defining the words in the passage using a concordance or Bible dictionary to best understand the use of the word in that passage.

6. Repetition Tool

One of the ways that a Bible author can get our attention or make sure we don't miss something important is to say it more than once. We should look for words and/or phrases that are repeated in a passage or throughout a book.

Read Isaiah 53:4-6 and make note of a few words or a theme that is repeated throughout these three verses.

⁴ Surely he took up our pain
and bore our suffering,
yet we considered him punished by God,
stricken by him, and afflicted.

⁵ But he was pierced for our transgressions,
he was crushed for our iniquities;
the punishment that brought us peace was on him,
and by his wounds we are healed.

⁶ We all, like sheep, have gone astray,
each of us has turned to our own way;
and the LORD has laid on him
the iniquity of us all.

Theme of sacrifice
Substitution: He/him/his vs us/we/our
Substitutionary atonement

Words repeated in 1 John:
Light, dark, Jesus, obedience, love,
fellowship, sin, etc...

What do you see? What words, phrases, or topics are repeated in these 3 verses?

What is the primary message that Isaiah may be communicating in this passage about Jesus?

You may note that in these three verses, there is a contrast between he/him/his and we/us/our. This promised Suffering Servant is meant to take our place, to be our substitute. The theme of substitutionary atonement is being introduced.

As you study 1 John, you will see several words, phrases and themes that are repeated. Plan to make a list of these as you develop your outline of the book.

7. Quotations and Allusions Tool

Sometimes a Bible author will quote or allude to another verse in the Bible to reinforce the point they are making. It is always a good idea to look up the original context of a quotation.

Here's an example: Read Luke 4:16-21. Your Bible may note that Jesus is quoting from Isaiah 61:1-2. Jesus first is stating in this example that Isaiah's prophecy points to Himself as the promised Messiah. The second thing to notice is that Jesus ends the quote from Isaiah 61 in the middle of the verse 2. Jesus cuts out the reference to "the day of vengeance of our God". Jesus seems to be saying that "this is the day of God's favor, but it is not yet the day of judgment!" Judgment will come but there is still time to repent, believe and receive forgiveness before the day of vengeance or judgment comes.

Allusions are more difficult to spot because we may not know the Old Testament well enough to identify these allusions. A cross-reference Bible will help to identify these allusions. The better we know the Old and New Testament, the better we will be at identifying these connections that the author is making for us.

In our study of 1 John, there are no Old Testament quotations. John makes many references to his Gospel as well as a few other New Testament references and allusions. As you study 1 John, look and listen for these references to develop a deeper understanding of a specific passage and the entire book.

For example, in 1 John 1:1-4 we read,

1 That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life— ² the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us— ³ that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. ⁴ And we are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.

John is making the point that Jesus came in the flesh. He was not just a phantom but truly God and truly man. This may cause you to look back to what John wrote in the first chapter of his gospel, John 1:1-4 and 14.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was in the beginning with God. ³ All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. ⁴ In him was life, and the life was the light of men. ⁵ The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

¹⁴ And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

As you study 1 John, look for allusions like this to the Gospel of John and other New Testament books, to better understand the message of 1 John.

8. The Genre Tool

There are various forms of writing within the Bible called *genre*.

Here are some of the major *genres* in the Bible (from *Living by the Book*, Howard Hendricks):

- Exposition: Carefully reasoned arguments or explanations; well organized; logical flow; terms are crucial; builds to a logical, compelling climax, the aim is agreement and action. (Doctrine)
- Narrative and Biography: A broad category in which story is prominent; includes historical accounts; structure is conveyed through plot; characters undergo psychological and spiritual development; selected events used to convey meaning; events positioned for contrast and comparison. (Descriptive)
- Parable: Brief oral story illustrating a moral; truth frequently lies on characters and stereotypes; presents scenes and activities common to everyday life; encourages reflection and self-evaluation.
- Poetry: Verse intended to be spoken or sung rather than read; emphasis on cadence and sounds of words; vivid images and symbols; appeals to emotions; may employ features of praise; in the Old Testament is the heavy use of parallelism.
- Proverb: Short, pithy statements of moral truth; reduces life to black-and-white categories; often addressed to youth; frequently employs parallelism; points readers toward the right and away from evil; heavy use of metaphors and similes.
- Wisdom Literature: A broad category in which an older, seasoned person relates wisdom to a younger; may use parables; gives observations on fundamental area of life – birth, death, work, money, power, time, the earth, etc.; appeals to the basis of human experience.
- Prophecy: Authoritative presentation of God’s will and words; frequently intended as corrective; intended to motivate change through warnings; foretells God’s plan in response to human choices.
- Apocalyptic: Dramatic, symbolic material vivid imagery; stark contrasts; events take place in the first-person as an eyewitness account; portrays a cosmic struggle between good and evil.

Much like with the different sections of a newspaper/magazine (i.e., Editorial, News, Sports, The Arts, Personal Testimonies, etc.) there are different literary forms in the Bible. Once we know the literary style we are reading, we can choose the correct approach for interpreting the meaning of what we are reading/studying.

How would you classify the genre for our study in 1 John? I would say the 1 John has more of an expository style with an emphasis on doctrinal and relational truths.

Two helpful rules to consider:

1. When something is presented as historical fact, pause to consider that it really happened.
2. When something is presented as imagery/metaphor, don't base crazy predictions of the future on its being literally or physically true. Take the time to understand how the author may be using the imagery or figures of speech to support his main points.

9. Example to Follow? Tool

Sometimes we are to follow the example of people we read about in the Bible. Here are three events in the Bible followed by a possible interpretation that could be correct or incorrect.

1. In Daniel 6, an order is given that prayer may not be offered to anyone but the king of Babylon. Daniel ignores the king's edict and continues to pray to the true God. Does this mean that we should follow Daniel and obey God rather than men?
2. In 1 Samuel 3 the young boy Samuel hears his name called during the night and thinks it is Eli calling him. Eli tells him it is God speaking to him, which leads to God giving Samuel a prophecy. Does this mean we should expect God to speak to us audibly and tell us what will happen in the future?
3. In 2 Samuel 11 King David commits adultery with Bathsheba and he remained king. Does this mean we can commit adultery without any impunity?

Do you see the problem with this approach of assuming that every example is a good example to follow? In example one, Daniel is surely an example to follow. But examples two and three are not intended to be examples for us to follow but rather examples to learn from to discern what is right and wrong.

The point is that we need to be very careful with this "follow my example" approach. Not everything done by a Bible character is good. And even the good things are not always normative; that is, they may not be always true for all Christians at all times.

Some events in the Bible are descriptive and others are prescriptive. Descriptive events simply describe what is happening in the story without any statement regarding whether this is approved by and/or honoring to God. Something that is prescriptive means that it can be applied to our lives in specific situations and it might even be normative for all people at all times.

One test is whether the example in question aligns with or contradicts what is said in the Bible in other books.

10. Who Am I? Tool

Often when we read about stories in the Bible, we tend to identify ourselves with the main character. More often the “heroes” in the Bible are intended to be pictures of Jesus, and so we should learn from them about Him, rather than about ourselves. Sometimes the characters we should identify with aren’t the heroes so much as the “villains”.

However, sometimes these characters are role models (both positive and negative) for us. We just need to stop and think before we rush to put ourselves into the picture.

Consider the story of Joshua. We often want to relate with Moses or Joshua as great leaders. The greater point may be that Jesus is the true Leader, Deliverer, Savior. Instead of us relating to Moses or Joshua, we might relate more to the nation of Israel in our unbelief and fickle faith.

This concludes our brief introduction of ten tools that might help us in our study of the Bible as we work to understand what God meant to communicate through the author to the original audience. We provided a few examples throughout this lesson, but you will have an opportunity to apply some of these tools in a practical manner as we begin our study of the book of 1 John in Lesson 3.

Lesson 3 is titled, How to Study a Book of the Bible. We will build upon the three-step process of Observation, Interpretation and Application. We will propose seven steps for studying a book of the Bible that can be repeated for every book in the Bible. The seven steps are:

1. Select a book to study
2. Master the Book’s content
3. Prepare an Introduction/Overview of the Book
4. Divide the Book into Sections and Create a Book Chart
5. Study each Verse within a Section in order
6. Classify your Results
7. Reflect Upon and Apply Your Learnings

So, grab your bible, something to write with, and your handout as you begin your personal study through 1 John.