

Introduction

Making Sense of the Bible in our Daily Lives

I have put off writing this introduction for as long as I could. No previous study has been quite as overwhelming as this. The task I have described as “making sense of the Bible” has proven to be remarkably more difficult than I anticipated. I’m not sure where to start. I’m less sure where to finish.

I am a lifelong student and borderline nerd, so it's not that I don't *want* to study the Bible. It's that I don't want to bore you with unnecessary detail. And I don't want to downplay the mystery. And I don't want to overlook the complexity. And I don't want to get so hung up on the complexity that we miss the simplicity.

You can see the struggle.

At the end of these seven lessons, I don't want you to merely be more informed about the Bible. I want you to be enthralled by a God who would wrap Himself in human flesh and weave Himself into human words so that we might know Him. I want you to be amazed that He loved you enough to give His life for you and that He preserved His Word to make sure that you would know it. I want you to be sure of who God is and certain that you'll never get to the bottom of it.

I want you to be satisfied by the Lord but never to the point that you lose your hunger for Him.

As we begin, all I know to do is to offer you this—my testimony in a nutshell: God has used His written Word, the Bible, to reveal Himself to me by the power of His Spirit. He has mystified me on these pages. He has confused me. He has amazed me. He has surprised me. He has shocked and comforted and corrected and guided me.

Time and again, I have not known where to find Him, and I have found Him with the weight of His Word laid across my lap in my living room. When I have not known where else to look, I have turned to what I know—to these words, breathed by God and recorded by His followers.

And He has met me here. On these unnaturally thin pages with the annoyingly small font, I have found a God big enough to take my breath away and near enough to wait for me to catch it.

I have searched for a God who delights to be found. I have found a God worth searching for.

I pray you will too.

REFLECTIONS ON BIBLE STUDY

Our past experiences can greatly influence the way that we approach the Bible today. We all approach this study from different perspectives and in different seasons. Some may be brand new to the study of God's Word. Some may have studied it for decades. Many are somewhere in between. Take some time below to reflect on what your relationship with the Lord and His Word has been in the past and how that influences the thoughts, attitudes, and expectations that you bring with you to this study.

1. When you think about starting a Bible study about "how to study the Bible," what is your initial reaction?
2. What are you hoping to get out of your time in this study?
3. What is your experience with the Bible? (There's no right answer here. You are free to be honest without fear or shame.) What role has it played in your relationship with Christ? How have you previously approached it?
4. How has God revealed Himself to you in the past? Is it through nature? Some circumstance? Other people? The Bible? How do you sense His nearness or His goodness most often?

Read Mark 12:28-31. I talked about verse 30 in the introductory talk, but I want to give you a chance to read and consider Jesus' words in Mark for yourself.

5. What question is Jesus answering in Mark 12:30?
6. How does He answer it?

We are commanded to love the Lord with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength. I believe that applies to Bible study in that when we open the Bible, we are looking to better know and love the God who has written His Word down for us.

We can only love someone to the extent that we know someone, and we can only know someone to the extent that they are willing to reveal themselves. Reading the Bible doesn't prove we love God. But it is one way that we can cooperate with Him to increase our love for Him.

Thank the Lord, we come before a holy God who delights to make Himself known.

7. How would you describe or define each of the following words in Mark 12:30? You can refer back to the lecture notes as well.

- Heart:

- Soul:

- Mind:

- Strength:

In the second part of this study, we will spend time considering specific ways to approach the Lord in His Word with our heart, soul, mind, and strength. Most of us tend to lean more on one of these aspects of ourselves when we read the Bible, but we want to consider what it will look like to approach the Lord with our entire beings.

What we *know* and *understand* with our minds can shape what we love with our *hearts*, and what we *experience* in our souls can shape what we *know* of the Lord. This all requires some effort and discipline on our part—some *strength*. So as we begin this study, I want us to think about the parts of ourselves that we are most prone to rely on and the parts of ourselves that might need a little strengthening in the Lord.

8. Which aspect of yourself is easiest to bring before the Lord as you approach His Word?

9. Which aspect requires more effort on your part?

Read the warning found in John 5:39-40.

10. What is one risk associated with approaching the Bible in the wrong way?

Sometimes, in our quest for knowledge and understanding, we can miss the very One who has recorded His Word for us.

11. Have you been guilty of that in the past? If so, use this moment as an opportunity to ask the Lord to forgive you for elevating knowledge *of* God above love *for* Him. If you have not been guilty of this, take some time to ask Him to help you guard your heart against become hungry for knowledge rather than hungry for God Himself.

Another risk associated with the reading and studying of Scripture has to do with our souls. We may rely too heavily on our feelings, emotions, desires, or affections . When we do, we will be tempted to elevate our experiences above what God says. If our current experience doesn't seem to line up with what the Bible says, if our desires aren't met or we don't feel the way we think that we should feel, then we may be prone dismiss the Bible and doubt its truth. Let's consider a possible example.

12. Read Psalm 100:5. What does it report about the Lord?

13. Is there an experience in your life that has caused or is causing you to doubt God's goodness? How does that affect your willingness to be open with the Lord and to trust Him?

If we believe the Bible to be true, then it makes sense to believe what it reports about God, even when we don't understand it. That doesn't mean we stuff our feelings or deny our experiences. But what if, instead of turning away from God, doubting His goodness, we engage with Him on the pages of His Word.

Sometimes, interacting with God in His Word might look something like this:

Lord, you claim to be good. The Bible says you are good. Others have spoken of your goodness. There are even, if I'm honest, some things in my life that suggest you are good. But there are also things in my life that make me doubt

it-maybe there's even this ONE, BIG thing. I want to trust You and Your Word. I want to believe it. So, I need You to remind me of your goodness in a way that I can recognize. Would you do that for me?

This is not doubting God. This is trusting Him with our soul's honest response to what He has written and claimed.

14. Re-read Psalm 100:5, but this time Imagine that you are seated with the Lord as you read it. (This is in fact not an imaginary situation—we *are* seated with the Lord when we open His Word.) But imagine you can see Him. Remember that you can talk to Him.

15. How would you want to respond to His claim of being good in Psalm 100:5? You can be honest with Him.

16. Is there any circumstance in which you have seen God's goodness? Sometimes it helps to remind our souls of times when the truth of God's claims have been more evident in our lives.

Maybe this example of God's goodness doesn't apply to you. But the principle still does. This is how we engage the Lord as we read His Word and seek to believe Him.

17. Read Mark 9:20-24. What does the boy's father ask of Jesus in verse 24?

I love the reminder that our requests can be this simple and this needy. *I do believe. I desire to believe. Help my unbelief!*

We have a God who is not only willing, but also able, to respond.

As we close our time this week, I want you to take a moment and consider what it would mean for you to bring your strength as you open God's Word over these coming weeks.

We don't come to the Word to prove or earn anything from the Lord. But we do receive from Him here. We do meet Him here. We do benefit from knowing what His Word says and seeking the One who has authored it.

With that in mind, what does it look like for you to apply your “ability, force, might”¹ to your time in the Bible? It doesn't mean perfection. It may not look the same for you as it does for another person in your small group or for another one of your friends. But get creative and get with the Lord.

I'm trusting that we can do this without getting too legalistic about it, but I've also found that some of what generations before us have called “discipline” we dismiss as “legalism,” and we miss out on some of what the Lord has for us because of it.

18. What would it look like to apply your strength as you seek Him in His Word? Here are a few specific questions to consider as you get started thinking about this? Take a moment to pray and invite Him into this time with you.

- Set yourself up for success here. What's the next step you can take in seeking to know God better through His Word? *(Just think of one next step. For example, if you only read the Bible during the sermon on Sunday, could you find time during one other day that you could read it? If you read it daily but have never understood the Psalms, could you add reading one Psalm a day? Etc.)*
- Is there anyone whose help you need in order to protect or create some time to spend reading God's Word? *(Maybe your husband does breakfast with the kids one day. Maybe your roommate knows you aren't watching TV on Wednesday nights. Maybe your coworkers know you eat lunch alone on Tuesdays.)*
- Is there any unrealistic expectation that you need to lay down in order to do this? *(This may look like thinking every errand needs to be run and the house needs to be spotless before you can take this time with Him. Maybe your expectation is that every moment in the Bible will be magical, and you're disappointed when it's not. Maybe you believe that there will be some better season when it's more convenient to read the Bible.)*
- What are we reminded of in 2 Timothy 1:7? How is that an encouragement to you as you begin this Bible study?

¹ "G2479 - ischys - Strong's Greek Lexicon (nasb95)." Blue Letter Bible. Web. 12 Sep, 2024. <<https://www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/g2479/nasb95/mgnt/0-1/>>.