

MAN IN THE MIRROR BIBLE STUDY

Series: A Mans Guide to the Bible

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Good Morning, Men!

Our shout out this morning goes to some men in Charleston, SC called the Real Men of God. This is nine to twelve men that have been meeting for the past 10 months. So we send a very warm welcome to them.

This morning we are going to talk about interpretation. Can you think of anything that is more delightful than to be reading the scriptures and be surprised by fresh insight about God? I am going to teach you how to do that on demand. Any time you want an insight into scripture you can make that happen if you have the skill to do it.

This will not be a seminary class, it will not be enough to teach you how to be a Bible teacher, and it will teach you how to have a deeper and richer understanding of the scripture. I must tell you that preparation for this has brought me more joy and pleasure than almost any week in the last year or two, because there is no way I could put this message together in one week. This message took me 25 years to put together.

I have a worksheet that I use each week (as a guideline) and I call it the Grace Based Application Oriented Bible Study Preparation Worksheet. Over the years I have accumulated so much information that I was starting over. I went back through all that information for this week and cleaned it up for you. I want you to know that the worksheet that we are going to go over today is the actual worksheet that I will be using to study the scriptures going forward when I prepare the messages for you. There are three things that are very elementary to know if you want to understand a text.

1. What did it mean to the original author? What was God saying then?
2. What is the timeless message for all people at all time and all places?
3. The application: how does the Spirit want to use that text to transform my life today?

This is very important to understand, the Bible is truth – it is truth as a message.

In the 4th century B.C. Philip of Macedonia invaded northern Greece and began taking over some city states up there. Down in Athens the great political orators of the day were debating what they should do to respond to the invasion by Philip. Isocrates was a great teacher; he expounded everything people needed to know of the situation. When Isocrates was done people said how well he speaks. Then Demosthenes spoke; he was not so much interested in the truth but also what should be done as result of the truth. When Demosthenes finished speaking people said let's march against Philip. The Bible is a message and it wants us to march; there is a challenge

in here. It is not just truth and information, it is a message and this worksheet is in particular design to get you to not only know the truth but to get the message and figure out how to apply it to your life.

On your table you have two copies each of today's worksheet; so you can write on one and if some of you want to take and use it in you Bible study you have an extra one to do that with.

Let me calibrate this to you. The title is How to accurately interpret the Bible for yourself. What it says, what it means and how it applies. Notice there are two introductory comments. The starting point for any study is a text. The goal for the text is 2 Timothy 2:15- to correctly handle the word of truth.

What is the first thing you think about when reading a text of scripture? How does this apply to me? The answer is it depends on what it meant then and what it means now. How do we find that out? That is what this worksheet does it helps us understand what happened then and now and how to apply it. Notice the second part is what I bring to the text. What do I already know that affects my interpretation? The goal in thinking about the text before you dive into it is to understand my heart so it is most teachable and I am most hungry for God.

Drop down to the next bolded area which is the number 1 and that corresponds to the upper left hand circle of what is God saying then. The goal in studying the text initially, the first phase, is to figure out what the author meant. What did the writer/Holy Spirit want to communicate to his readers then?

Number 2 is the message and what does the text mean today; and the goal is to discover the timeless message.

There has always been a message for you today in every text. When these Bible verses were written, God knew you would be reading them and it was always his intention, not only for it to mean something, but to mean something to you.

Jesus prayed in John 17 Father I pray not only for them but all who will believe through them. And then great commission, that they would go and spread the message so others would believe. God knew you would be reading the Bible. He has a message for you with a timeless message in every verse.

Number 3 is the application: how does it apply now? The goal there is to lead a powerful life transformed by the gospel of Jesus Christ. Some questions to ask: How does the Spirit want me to personally apply the text's message?

That is the overview; here is the perspective of the week: if correctly handled the Bible can be interpreted to tell us what the author originally meant, the timeless message the Spirit has for us today and how to personally apply the message so that we can lead a powerful life, transformed by Jesus Christ.

Some of you are equipped to do this already; for some others this maybe a little overwhelming, but probably for most of you this is very exciting. There is a text or two in scripture that you

have wondered what it really meant, if it applies to you now or if it was just for then. 2

Chronicles 7:14

14 if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land.

Let me ask you, have you ever wondered if that really applies to today?

Just to review from the worksheet a bit. The starting point is a text and the goal is to correctly handle the word of God. To find the answers to your questions you don't come to the text empty handed. You come to the text with a set of understandings. For example the structure of the Bible: 40 human authors each addressing the needs of his own generation or the plot (the thought of the Bible) Loving father relentlessly pursues relationship with his children.

The Bible is about God and salvation and discipleship. Calling, Equipping and Sending men to be followers of Christ. These are the themes of the Bible and you bring these understandings. The content of the Bible is redemptive history and doctrine, for that you have a statement of faith. You bring all of this with you to the text. You also bring presuppositions; you either bring a biblical world view or you bring something other than a biblical world view. I love how many athletes say if you want it bad enough you can win. Not really, there is only one winner and thousands of losers in every deal. They all say the same thing.

Prayer, don't come empty handed; bring yourself into the presence of Jesus and invite the Holy Spirit to tutor your heart.

John 3:27

Let me give you the big idea first, the three phases of accurate interpretation are meaning, message and application. Just another way of saying things we have already said.

First, take John 3:27- John the Baptist is out baptizing and has been with Jesus. Vs 25

25 An argument developed between some of John's disciples and a certain Jew over the matter of ceremonial washing. 26 They came to John and said to him, "Rabbi, that man who was with you on the other side of the Jordan--the one you testified about--well, he is baptizing, and everyone is going to him."

It is pretty clear what it meant, someone offering a personal service came along and has become more successful than the one who originally offered it.

Notice that on the front of the worksheet where it says 'questions to ask' I put that these questions are applied selectively. Not each question needs to be answered each time. You are trying to answer enough questions to answer the golden question: what did the writer/Spirit want to communicate to his readers at that time? One of the things you might want to do is who wrote this, to whom did they write it, what was the occasion, and when did it happen?

Reading in John 3:27

27 To this John replied, "A man can receive only what is given him from heaven.

That is remarkable! What it meant to the original author is that John understood the supremacy of Christ. John understood that God had given him a specific task and he was going to be content with that task. That is what the writer is trying to communicate here.

One of the principle rules of interpretation is that scripture interprets scripture.

Let me ask you a question: does this scripture bring to your mind any other scriptures that are related?

For example Ephesians 2:10

10 For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

That scripture enhances the meaning of John 3:27. Look at Ephesians 4:11-13

11 It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, 12 to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up 13 until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

God gives these different roles. This enhances the meaning of the text.

Down at the bottom of your worksheet it says there are rules for interpretation. We are not going through them but they are fairly intuitive. Authorial intent – it has to mean what the author wanted it to mean. You can't make up your own meaning; you have to figure out how it applies to you now.

One of the rules of interpretation is to read it as literature, literally, if you are reading poetry you read it like poetry; if like history read it like history.

Again the Big Idea: the three phases are Meaning, Message and Interpretation. So we just looked at the Meaning of John 3:27. Now let's look at the Message – what does the text mean today?

On your worksheet, what does the text mean today? Again the goal is to discover the timeless message. There are some questions you can ask of the text to get that answer. The example there is of Pharaoh when Moses came to Pharaoh and said that the Hebrews have too much time on their hands. We are going to reduce the amount of straw we give them to make bricks but we are not going to reduce their quota. In other words they will have to work twice as hard to get the same result.

One great way to figure out the timeless message is to ask what that would look like if it happened today. An example of that would be downsizing in a corporation. They have the same amount of work to do, with fewer resources to get it done.

What is the timeless message the spirit wants to communicate to his readers today. Back to John, if what the message meant then No man can receive anything except that which is given from above. If it meant that John was a workman for Jesus and had a lesser role than Jesus, what does that mean (the timeless message) for you today? We are all working for Jesus and he has a role for each of us.

God had a role for John and John understood that role. The timeless message is that God has a role for you; and part of your task is to understand what that role is for you.

The application: how does it apply to us now? The goal here is to figure out how to use this timeless message that God has a role for me now, how do we use this to lead a powerful life transformed by the gospel of Jesus by the Holy Spirit? How does the Spirit want me to personally apply the message of this text?

I was with a man last Saturday and I heard him speak. He had such executive presence and yet his career had never flourished. I could easily see him as the CEO of a fortune five hundred company. He was that eloquent. Afterward I was talking with him and found that he had a lower middle class management job, I said why aren't you the CEO of a fortune 500? You could feel that I had touched the tenderest part of his life. He was in pain because his life had not turned out the way he wanted or thought it might. When the conversation got there, I shared this verse John 3:27 *No man can receive anything except that which is given from above.* And the message that the Spirit has in this text for you and me is that there is great joy in being able to accept your lot in life.

Do you see what happened to John? He was able to see his role and accept his lot in life. The timeless message is that God had a role for you too. And the way to apply this is to learn to accept our lot in life and give praise.

I thought I was going to be the next Billy Graham. I don't sit around and think about the fact that I didn't become the next Billy Graham, I am very happy that I am the present Pat Morley. I have learned to accept my lot in life. The truth is some people wish they could be someone else.

How about the Holy Spirit, these people believed in Jesus and then the Spirit came upon them and they spoke in tongues. How do you understand that text? That text in an historical narrative; one of the rules of interpretation is that didactics interpret narrative.

Paul had didactic teaching about the Holy Spirit; we looked at Ephesians 1:13 last week and saw that the Holy Spirit is given as a deposit of our inheritance.

You could do a word study on the Holy Spirit and you would find that everyone gets the Holy Spirit when they believe. He is the deposit of God in your life.

You cannot use history to necessarily create the norm. History is not normative. That was the launching of the Holy Spirit.

We have a different scenario now, and the verses in Acts 2 and Ephesians 1 you can look at later.

One more example Paul's thorn in the flesh; 2 Corinthians 12:7-10 Paul was given revelations from God, but was also given a thorn in the flesh so he wouldn't become conceited.

7 To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. 8 Three times I pleaded with the LORD to take it away from me.

Now what is the timeless message? Sometimes God puts things in our lives to keep us humble. That is the timeless message.

The scripture goes on and Jesus speaks to Paul, who had asked three times to have it removed, *9 But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. 10 That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.*

It doesn't take a genius to see what it meant to Paul; the timeless message is: His grace is sufficient for everything you go through and you might go through it to keep you from being conceited. Receive these things with joy.

I mentioned I Peter 4:1, 2 for me regarding my migraines

1 Therefore, since Christ suffered in his body, arm yourselves also with the same attitude, because he who has suffered in his body is done with sin. 2 As a result, he does not live the rest of his earthly life for evil human desires, but rather for the will of God.

Those two passages are very connected. Number one principle of interpretation: Scripture interprets scripture.

It is one story, everything is connected. When you see the connection is when the bombs go off and you have the emotional explosions and the tears come or the laughter. Sometimes there is a deep conviction because you realize you have not been happy with your life. Tears of joy because Paul had a thorn in his side and you can relate. Christ's power is made perfect in our weakness.

The goal is to get you to be able to use the worksheet and have that exquisite pleasure that comes from being able to accurately interpret the word of God.

Let's Pray:

Our Father, we love your word. We love that it is truth with a message. We want to march. I pray that you would help each of us accurately interpret the word; you would help us have greater skill to understand what the text meant to the original author, what the timeless message is and what the Spirit wants to apply to change our lives. We ask this in your name, AMEN.