

How to Study the Bible – Week 3 – The Context Factor – Bible Study Helps

Title: Context Matters

Sermon Summary: This sermon, part of a series called "How to Study the Bible in 2026," focuses on the critical importance of understanding biblical context. The sermon argues that context is not merely an academic concern but a heaven-and-hell issue, as false teachers and cults have long exploited decontextualized scripture to lead people astray. Drawing on examples from both personal experience and biblical history, the sermon demonstrates that the devil himself uses scripture out of context, that religious leaders can be deeply wrong despite extensive scriptural familiarity, and that every believer must learn to rightly divide the Word of God. The sermon introduces two primary types of context -- near context, which involves examining surrounding verses and passages, and remote context, which involves understanding the theme and purpose of the entire book in which a verse is found. The sermon walks through several commonly misused verses, correcting popular misapplications and showing how proper context unlocks the Bible's true meaning, protects believers from false doctrine, and produces genuine spiritual growth.

Key Points:

- Rightly dividing the Bible, as commanded in 2 Timothy 2:15, implies that it is entirely possible to wrongly divide it, and wrongly dividing the Bible results in taking verses out of context
- Satan has been mishandling scripture since Genesis 3, and false teachers intentionally or ignorantly twist scripture to their own and others' destruction
- Near context means examining the verses immediately before and after a passage, as well as surrounding chapters, to determine what a verse actually teaches
- Remote context means considering the theme, audience, and purpose of the entire book in which a verse appears before drawing doctrinal conclusions
- The book of Acts is a transitional book moving from Jews to Gentiles, from Peter to Paul, and from Jerusalem to Antioch, and doctrine for the church age should not be drawn from it in isolation
- Romans through Philemon represents the portion of the New Testament written directly to church-age believers, and these letters form the primary doctrinal foundation for Christians today
- The proper method of Bible study is to first determine what a passage actually teaches in its context, and only then make personal or practical application
- Common phrases such as "don't judge me," "I can do all things through Christ," "where two or three are gathered," and "God won't give you more than you can handle" are frequently quoted out of context and do not mean what popular usage implies
- The Roman Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation is rooted in a misreading of John 6, where Jesus was speaking spiritually, not literally, about consuming his flesh and blood
- Baptismal regeneration, taught by churches of Christ and others using Acts 2:38, fails to account for the transitional nature of the book of Acts and its specific Jewish audience

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Scripture Reference:

- Psalm 56:5, where David describes his words being twisted or wrestled by his enemies, serving as the entry point for the sermon's theme
- 2 Timothy 2:15, which commands believers to study and rightly divide the word of truth, and serves as the headline verse for the entire series
- Jeremiah 23:36, which warns against perverting the words of the living God
- Matthew 22:29, where Jesus tells the religious leaders they err because they do not know the scriptures nor the power of God
- 2 Peter 3:16, where Peter warns that unlearned and unstable people twist Paul's writings, as they do other scriptures, to their own destruction
- Matthew 4, where Satan quotes scripture in an attempt to manipulate Jesus during the temptation in the wilderness
- 2 Corinthians 11:3-4 and 11:13-15, which warn about false apostles, another Jesus, another spirit, and another gospel, and describe Satan as an angel of light who has ministers in his religions
- Matthew 7:1-6, the "judge not" passage, which in context teaches how to judge rightly rather than forbidding judgment altogether
- Matthew 18:15-20, the "two or three gathered" passage, which in context addresses the process of settling disputes among believers
- John 6:53-66, where Jesus speaks of eating his flesh and drinking his blood, and clarifies that his words are spirit and life, not a literal instruction
- Acts 2:36-38, the baptism passage incorrectly used by churches of Christ and other false teachers, examined in light of its Jewish audience and transitional context
- Revelation 3:20, where Jesus stands outside the Laodicean church knocking, which in context addresses a church that has excluded Christ rather than an individual salvation appeal

Stories:

- The pastor shares his personal background of growing up in a Mormon church, describing himself as a "Christmas and Easter Mormon," and recounting how Mormon elders would take Old Testament scriptures out of context to teach their own doctrines, which he only recognized as false after getting saved
- Everyday communication misunderstandings that result from a lack of surrounding context, using this as an everyday illustration of why context matters

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- The pastor recounts visiting a Baptist church in Cincinnati, where a Sunday school class was derailed because participants had different Bible translations and the discussion centered on personal feelings about the text rather than what the text actually says
- The pastor describes a visit to a sacred Mormon site in Palmyra, New York, the site where Joseph Smith claimed to receive golden plates and being visited by an angel, and reflects on being present among people being duped by religious lies because of ignorance of the holy Bible
- A reference to watching cooking videos about marinating steaks on a Blackstone griddle, using the image of marinating as an analogy for allowing biblical truth to settle into the mind over time rather than consuming it quickly and moving on
- A reference to receiving DVDs of a popular Bible teacher as gifts, noting that the teacher began with solid content but eventually taught bizarre doctrines, illustrating how the devil draws people in gradually before leading them astray
- The pastor recounts his own confirmation experience in the Mormon church at age eight or nine, where elders laid hands on him after water baptism and declared he had received the Holy Ghost, and explains how this was falsely drawn from the transitional practices recorded in the book of Acts

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Discipleship Questions

The sermon warns that religious leaders in Jesus's time had memorized and recited Scripture yet still erred in their understanding -- in what ways might modern Christians fall into the same trap of knowing verses without truly knowing what they mean in context?

The sermon describes context as a heaven and hell issue, particularly when false teachers use isolated verses to lead people toward incorrect doctrines about salvation -- how should this reality shape the urgency with which you approach your own Bible study?

Satan quoted Scripture directly to Jesus in Matthew 4, demonstrating that the ability to cite the Bible is not itself proof of truth -- what safeguards can believers put in place to discern whether a teaching is sound or merely sounds scriptural?

The sermon draws a distinction between Scripture that is written to us and Scripture that is written for us, suggesting that not every passage applies directly to the church age believer -- how does this distinction change the way you read and apply the Bible in your daily life?

The sermon points out that the book of Acts is a transitional book and warns against building church age doctrine from it -- what does it reveal about the importance of understanding the historical and redemptive context of a biblical book before drawing conclusions from it?

The sermon uses the example of Matthew 7 and the phrase 'judge not' to show how a verse stripped of its surrounding context can be used to mean the exact opposite of what Jesus intended -- can you think of other commonly misquoted verses where keeping reading would dramatically change the interpretation?

Peter writes in 2 Peter 3:16 that unstable and unlearned people twist Paul's writings to their own destruction, suggesting that ignorance of context carries serious spiritual consequences -- what personal responsibility does this place on every believer to pursue genuine biblical literacy?

The sermon describes an encounter in a Sunday school class where different Bible translations and a focus on personal feelings rather than textual meaning created confusion -- what does this suggest about the role that the text itself, rather than individual experience, should play in guiding interpretation?

The sermon illustrates how the first six books of the Old Testament mirror the spiritual journey of a saved person from death to victory -- how does recognizing these larger patterns across Scripture deepen your understanding of God's unified purpose in the Bible?

The sermon emphasizes that the Holy Spirit, who inspired the Bible, also lives within every believer and desires to guide them into truth -- what does it look like practically to depend on the Holy Spirit as a guide in Bible study rather than relying solely on human teachers or popular interpretations?

Small Group Guide: Context Is Everything

How to Study the Bible in 2026 | Week: Context

Before You Begin

Encourage group members to bring their Bibles and a copy of the sermon notes if available. Open with prayer, asking the Holy Spirit to guide the discussion and help the group rightly understand what God has said.

Key Takeaways

- God commands believers to study and rightly divide the Bible (2 Timothy 2:15), which means wrongly dividing it is a real and serious danger.
 - Context is not optional. It is the foundation of accurate Bible interpretation.
 - Near context means examining the verses, passage, and chapters surrounding a verse before drawing conclusions.
 - Remote context means considering the book, its theme, its audience, and where it fits in the larger story of Scripture.
 - False teachers, false cults, and even well-meaning Christians regularly take verses out of context, sometimes with eternal consequences.
 - The devil himself used Scripture out of context to tempt Jesus Christ in Matthew 4, which means no one is immune to this danger.
 - Not all of the Bible is written directly to the church age believer, though all of it is profitable. Knowing who a passage is written to is essential to interpreting it correctly.
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Discussion Questions

Opening the Conversation

1. Before this sermon, how did you typically approach a Bible verse you had a question about? Did you read the surrounding verses, or did you tend to focus on the verse alone?
2. Have you ever shared a Bible verse on social media or in conversation without fully knowing its context? What was the situation, and how do you think about it now?

Going Deeper

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3. Context is a heaven and hell issue. Before hearing this, would you have agreed? Can you think of an example where a verse taken out of context could lead someone to a false conclusion about salvation?
4. In Matthew 4, Satan quoted Scripture directly to Jesus Christ. What does that tell us about the importance of knowing not just what a verse says, but what it means in its proper setting?
5. The sermon walked through several commonly misused verses, including Matthew 7:1, Matthew 18:20, and Acts 2:38. Which of these examples was most surprising or challenging to you, and why?
6. Peter wrote in 2 Peter 3:16 that some people twist Paul's letters to their own destruction. What is the difference between someone who misuses Scripture out of ignorance and someone who does so intentionally? How should a Christian respond to each?
7. The book of Acts is a transitional book and the church age believer should draw doctrine primarily from Romans through Philemon. How does understanding the purpose and audience of a book change the way you read it?
8. Jesus told the religious leaders in Matthew 22:29 that they erred because they did not know the Scriptures, even though they had memorized, recited them, and considered themselves experts in the Scriptures. What is the difference between knowing Bible verses and knowing the Bible?

Personal Reflection

9. Is there a verse or teaching you have held onto for a long time that this sermon caused you to want to study more carefully? What is it, and what questions do you now have about its context?
 10. The sermon said that once you learn to rightly divide the Bible, it is liberating. Has there been a moment in your own Bible study when understanding the context of a passage opened up something you had never seen before? Share that experience with the group.
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Practical Applications

This Week, Individually

- Choose one verse you have quoted or heard quoted frequently. Look up the five verses before it and the five verses after it. Ask yourself: Does the surrounding passage change or clarify what this verse means?
- Review the list of commonly misused phrases from the sermon, such as "God won't give you more than you can handle" or "follow your heart." Pick one and look up where people claim it comes from. Study it in context and write down what the passage is actually teaching.
- Begin reading the book of Romans with the understanding that it is written directly to the church age believer. Note how Paul explains the gospel and salvation without any reference to water baptism as a requirement.

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As a Group

- Compile a list of verses or Christian phrases that your group has heard taken out of context. Bring them to the next meeting and work through one or two together using near context principles.
 - Practice the habit of asking two questions every time a verse is brought up in group discussion: Who is this written to, and what is happening in the surrounding passage? Make this a regular part of how your group studies Scripture together.
 - If any group members came from a church background where certain doctrines were taught using verses out of context, invite them to share their experience. Pray together for those still in those environments.
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A Word of Encouragement

Learning to read the Bible in context is not about becoming a critic of other Christians. It is about honoring God by taking His words seriously enough to find out what He actually said. The Holy Spirit who inspired the Bible lives inside every believer, and He wants to guide you into truth. The more you learn to handle the word of God correctly, the more useful you become to God and the more equipped you are to help others.

Do not be discouraged if some of these things need time to settle in. Let them marinate. Come back to the notes. Pray. Study. God rewards those who seek Him diligently, and His Word will not return void.

Closing Prayer Points

- Ask God for humility to let the Bible correct what you have believed incorrectly.
- Thank Him for giving believers the Holy Spirit as a guide into all truth.
- Pray for those in false religious systems who are hearing Scripture taken out of context and being led astray.
- Ask for boldness and clarity to share what the Bible actually teaches with those around you.

5-Day Bible Reading and Devotional Guide

Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth

Day 1: The Danger of Mishandling God's Word

Reading: 2 Timothy 2:15; Jeremiah 23:28-32

Devotional: God does not take lightly the mishandling of His Word. Jeremiah 23 records one of the most sobering warnings in all of Scripture, directed at those who distort what God has clearly said. The command in 2 Timothy 2:15 to study and rightly divide Scripture is not a suggestion for the academically inclined. It is a charge for every believer. If rightly dividing is possible, so is wrongly dividing. Ask yourself today whether you are consuming God's Word carefully or simply collecting verses that confirm what you already want to believe. Approach Scripture on its own terms.

Reflection: Are there verses you have quoted or believed without examining their full context? Commit today to reading beyond the single verse.

Day 2: How the Enemy Uses Scripture

Reading: Matthew 4:1-11; 2 Corinthians 11:3-15

Devotional: One of the most sobering realities in all of Scripture is that Satan himself quotes the Bible. In the wilderness temptation, he did not approach Jesus with outright lies alone. He came armed with Scripture, twisted just enough to mislead. This is the enemy's oldest strategy, and it has not changed. False teachers, false gospels, and false versions of Jesus still circulate today, often wrapped in the language of the Bible. The protection against this is not suspicion of Scripture but a deeper knowledge of it. A believer who knows the Word is not easily moved by a counterfeit version of it.

Reflection: How familiar are you with the whole counsel of God's Word? What steps can you take this week to deepen your knowledge of Scripture beyond isolated passages?

Day 3: Context Reveals What God Actually Said

Reading: Matthew 7:1-6; John 7:24

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Devotional: "Do not judge" is perhaps the most frequently misquoted instruction in the Bible. Yet a careful reading of Matthew 7 reveals that Jesus was not forbidding judgment. He was correcting the attitude behind it. He commands that we first deal with our own sin before addressing the sin of another, and then He instructs that we do address it. God's Word does not contradict itself. When a passage seems to say something that conflicts with the broader teaching of Scripture, the answer is almost always to keep reading. God is His own best interpreter, and He has given us everything we need to understand what He meant.

Reflection: Is there a passage you have long accepted at face value without reading its surrounding context? Set aside time today to read the full chapter in which it appears.

Day 4: The Right Book, the Right People, the Right Time

Reading: Acts 2:14-41; Romans 10:9-13

Devotional: The book of Acts records a period of extraordinary transition. God was moving from a primarily Jewish audience to a Gentile world, from Peter to Paul, from Jerusalem to Antioch. Pulling a single verse from that transition and building an entire doctrine for the church age upon it ignores everything happening around it. Romans 10 speaks plainly and directly to Gentile believers in the church age: salvation comes through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Understanding which book is speaking, to whom it is written, and in what period of history it was given is not splitting hairs. It is the difference between truth and error.

Reflection: Have you ever built a belief on a single verse without considering the broader book or audience? How does knowing the intended recipient of a passage change your understanding of it?

Day 5: The Holy Spirit as Your Guide into Truth

Reading: John 16:13; 1 Corinthians 2:9-14; Psalm 119:18

Devotional: God did not give believers a book and then leave them to figure it out alone. The same Holy Spirit who inspired the writing of Scripture lives inside every born-again believer and serves as the divine guide into all truth. This means that faithful Bible study is not merely an academic exercise. It is a spiritual one. When you open God's Word with a humble and teachable heart, you are inviting the Author Himself to illuminate what He wrote. The psalmist prayed that God would open his eyes to behold wondrous things from His law. That prayer is still answered today. Study expecting God to speak.

Reflection: Do you approach Bible study as an intellectual exercise or as a conversation with God? Ask the Holy Spirit today to guide your understanding as you read, and then trust that He will.