

Study Guide: How to Read the Bible —

Week 3

The Explain Step

Overview

This session focuses on one of the most important steps in personal Bible reading: learning to explain what we read before we try to apply it. The goal is not simply to read words on a page but to hear God's voice speaking through Scripture. To do that well, we need to slow down, understand context, and allow the text to mean what God intended it to mean — not just what we feel in the moment.

Key Takeaways

1. Explanation is not optional — it is an act of humility. Going to God and asking Him to help us understand what He is saying is an act of trust. It acknowledges that we are the ones prone to misunderstanding, not God. His Word always accomplishes what He sends it out to do. We are the variable.

2. Context is everything. Every passage of Scripture exists within three layers of context that shape its meaning:

- **Literary context** — How does this passage fit within the flow of the book it is in?
- **Historical context** — Who wrote it, when, and to whom? What was happening around it?
- **Whole Bible context** — How does this passage fit into the larger story of creation, fall, redemption, and consummation that centers on Jesus?

3. Tools exist to help you. Resources like the Blue Letter Bible app, study Bible introductions, and commentaries are not just for scholars. They are available to every believer and can turn a moment of confusion in your quiet time into a moment of genuine understanding.

4. The Spirit of God is already at work in you. You are not approaching the Bible alone. The same Spirit who inspired the authors of Scripture dwells within every believer and helps us understand what we read.

Discussion Questions

Opening

1. Think about a time you were seriously misunderstood — whether in a conversation, a text message, or an email. What happened, and how did it get resolved? What does that experience tell you about the importance of seeking to truly understand what someone is communicating?
 2. Before this teaching, when you read the Bible, did you tend to slow down and ask what the passage meant in its original context, or did you move quickly to what it meant to you personally? Be honest. Why do you think that is?
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Going Deeper

3. The pastor described three layers of context for understanding any Bible passage: literary, historical, and whole Bible context. In your own words, what is the difference between these three? Why does each one matter?
 4. The pastor used Judges 6 and the story of Gideon as an example. The angel of the Lord called Gideon a "valiant warrior," yet Gideon was hiding in a winepress. What does the surrounding literary context of the book of Judges tell us about what God might be communicating through that irony? What would we miss if we only read that one verse in isolation?
 5. In Colossians 2, Paul says he is struggling greatly for the church at Colossae. Knowing the historical context — that Paul is writing from prison and is concerned about false teachers threatening the church — how does that change or deepen the way you read his words?
 6. The pastor described Jesus walking with the two disciples on the road to Emmaus in Luke 24, explaining how all of Scripture pointed to Himself. How does keeping Jesus at the center of the whole Bible change the way you read the Old Testament? Can you think of a passage from the Old Testament that takes on new meaning when you read it in light of Christ?
 7. The pastor shared a moment from his own quiet time in Jeremiah 15 where he was confused and had to dig deeper. He eventually discovered that Jeremiah had become bitter toward God — and that God's response was not to vindicate Jeremiah before the people, but to call Jeremiah himself to repentance. Have you ever read a Bible passage that confused or even bothered you? What did you do with that? What would it look like to press into it rather than move past it?
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Personal Reflection

8. The HEAR acrostic stands for Highlight, Explain, Apply, and Respond. Of these four steps, which one do you tend to skip most often? What is one practical thing you could do this week to slow down and give more attention to the Explain step?

9. The pastor mentioned that we bring a lot of baggage to our Bible reading — years of assumptions, half-remembered sermons, and cultural distance from the world of the Bible. What is one assumption you have carried into your Bible reading that you think may need to be examined more carefully?
 10. The pastor said that when Zechariah's mouth was finally opened after nine months of silence, the only thing that could come out was praise. What would it look like for your time in Scripture to produce that kind of response in you — not just information, but worship?
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Practical Applications

This Week, Choose One:

- **Start a reading plan.** Download the Bible app or Blue Letter Bible app and select a reading plan that gives structure to your daily Bible reading. Eliminate the decision fatigue of figuring out where to read each morning.
 - **Practice the Explain step.** When you sit down with your Bible this week, after reading your passage, take three to five minutes to write in a journal a brief explanation of what the passage is saying in its context. Ask yourself: What is the author trying to communicate? How does this fit in the book? How does it connect to Jesus and the larger story of Scripture?
 - **Use a tool.** The next time you encounter a verse or passage that confuses you, resist the urge to skip it. Instead, open Blue Letter Bible or a study Bible and spend a few minutes digging into what is happening in the text. Notice how understanding the context changes what you take away from the passage.
 - **Read with someone.** Invite a friend, family member, or fellow group member to read the same passage this week and compare what you each noticed. Discussion is one of the oldest and most effective tools for understanding Scripture.
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Closing Prayer Focus

Close your time by praying for the following:

- A genuine hunger for God's Word — not just information, but sustenance
 - Humility to let the text say what it says rather than what we want it to say
 - Wisdom and understanding as each person opens their Bible this week
 - Gratitude that God communicates to us at all — and that His Word never returns void
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Next session: The Apply and Respond steps — moving from understanding what God said to letting it shape how we live.