



CHARIS
MINISTRIES AFRICA

Introduction - How to lead a Bible Study

The Bible is the epic unfolding grand narrative in which we live, move, and have our being. It is God-breathed, and we discover on its pages all we need for life: ultimate revelation, ultimate meaning, ultimate purpose, ultimate hope, abundant life, and pure love. Its words tell us all that we need to know about who God is, who we are, why we are here and where we are going.

Spurgeon said: *'The Bible is not God, but it is God's voice and I do not hear it without awe.'*¹

Augustine said 6 centuries ago: *'Treat the Scripture of God as the face of God. Melt in its presence.'*²

The Bible has one-overarching purpose and that is to **reveal Christ**, the Son of God as the Saviour of the world, who comes to rescue us and reconcile us to God. (Luke 24:25-27/44-45).

Jesus is the Word (logos) – He is the Living Word, because he embodies completely all that God is, He is God incarnate (John 1:1). Jesus spoke creation into being by His words. He is the ultimate revelation of God and the living picture of God's holiness.

The Bible is Christocentric. It has been said that *the NT is Christ revealed and the OT is Christ concealed.*

OT Anticipation (of Christ and His kingdom)

Gospels- Manifestation

Acts – Proclamation

Epistles – Explanation

Revelation - Consummation³

So why study God's Word?

It has divine authority.

- The Holy Spirit inspired the 40+ authors to write according to God's will and purpose (2 Peter 1:20).

It shows us how to live a transformed life that pleases and reflects God.

- Psalm 1:1-3 tells us that the person who meditates on the Law (God's Word) day and night will flourish in whatever season or circumstances of their life.
- Hebrews 4:12 tells us God's word has life-changing dynamic power and is like a surgeon's knife in revealing who we are and what we are not. It discerns both good and evil within us, shining its light on the dark areas of our moral and spiritual life in order to transform us into Christ's likeness (2 Corinthians 3:18).
- Jeremiah 23:29 describes God's word as a fire that burns within, burning up the dross and a hammer that chips away at the hardness of our hearts.

¹ Spurgeon C. 'The Word a Sword' a sermon preached at Metropolitan Temple May 17, 1887

² Quoted in Robert Louis Wilkin's *The Spirit of Early Christian Thought* (Yale university Press, 2003) p. 50

³ Nelson T. Pastor of Denton Bible Church Texas

- We need to obey the word. Obedience is '*for our own good*' (Deuteronomy 10:12-13) because God created us and so knows what is best for us. He has set boundaries for our lives which if we adhere to them will help us to flourish and be in a 'happy' place i.e., in a place that brings joy to God. If a bird does not keep to the boundaries God has assigned to it and tries to swim, then it will die!⁴
- God's Word is only effective when it is obeyed and put into action (James 1:22-25). We need to study it, meditate upon it and then do it! (Matthew 7:24-27).
- It instructs us in how to lead a holy life that brings joy to God and the sins to avoid. (1 Peter 1:22-2:1)

God's word and message has power to save.

- It able to make us wise for salvation (2 Timothy 3:15-17).
- It can save our souls from sin and darkness. (James 12:21).
- The Gospel, good news has power to bring salvation to all. (2 Corinthians 11:23-26/Romans 1:16).
- God's word is life to us (Deuteronomy 32:47) *They are not just idle words for you-they are your life.* Obedience to God's commands leads to eternal life, disobedience leads to death.

God's word is our guide in life.

- When we want to know what to do, we can find help in God's word. It is described as a lamp unto our feet, (Psalm 119:105).
- Its teachings, correction and instruction are a light to our lives. (Proverbs 6:23).

God's word is our weapon against the enemy's lies and temptations.

- Ephesians 6:17 says God's word is the sword of the Spirit, which in the context of Ephesians 6, of spiritual warfare, means it can cut down the lies of the enemy by wielding divine truth.
- Jesus fought against Satan in the wilderness by using Scripture. *'Man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'* (Matthew 4:4)
- God's word can demolish spiritual strongholds of the enemy (2 Corinthians 10:4) by confronting evil with good and Satan's lies with God's truth.

God's Word is a delight!

- Psalm 1:2: *'Blessed is the one whose delight is in the law of the Lord.* Scripture should fill us with joy because they are God-breathed and bring us fullness of life.
- *How I love your law! I meditate on it all day long* (Psalm 119:97).
- The prophet Jeremiah describes God's word: *When your words came, I ate them, they were my joy and my hearts delight for I bear your name lord god almighty.* (Jeremiah 15:16.) Jeremiah meditated on God's words and internalised the meaning. He treasured it. We should go deep in God's word not just skim the surface, we need to digest the words, seek the meaning, and discover their power to change our lives.

God's word is communal and unifying.

- We meditate and read God's word solo of course, but we are told to study and apply it corporately too. *Let the message of Christ dwell among you as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom...* (Colossians 3:16).
- God provides the church with pastors and teachers who can teach and apply God's word correctly in our different contexts and circumstances and protect the church from heresies (Titus 1:9).

⁴ Smethurst M. *Before you Open Your Bible* (Leyland 10 Publishing) p. 37

- Ephesians 4:11—13 says pastors, evangelists and teachers are to equip God's people so that our faith matures, there is a deeper unity amongst us, a greater love for God and the world, and an increasing likeness of Jesus.

Four Step Rule in studying the Bible

- 1. Pray**
- 2. Observation**
- 3. Interpretation**
- 4. Application**

1. Pray

We need to pray and ask the Holy Spirit to open and illuminate our minds to understand God's word and apply its wisdom and power to our daily lives.

The Spirit searches all things even the deep things of God.,.,The person with the Spirit makes judgements about all things, but such a person is not subject to merely human judgements. Who has known the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ.' (1 Corinthians 2:10,15-16)

Daniel 2:21-2 says: *'He gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to the discerning. He reveals deep and hidden things; he knows what lies in darkness and light dwells with him.'*
 Jeremiah 33:3 says: *'Call to me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know.'*

John 16:12: *'But when he comes the Spirit of truth, he will guide you into all truth.'*

2. Observation

Read the passage.

Use your imagination to imagine you are there with the author. What do you see, hear, smell, notice, feel? What is missing? What jumps out at you?

Who is/are the main player(s)? What is the main focus? Does the passage remind you of another passage in the bible? Do you see cross-links with OT/NT?

3. Interpretation

Context – think about the historical, cultural, literary context of the passage and ask these questions: When, where, by whom, why was it written?

Genre/Literary Context – There are several different types of biblical genres: narrative, historical narrative, law. poetry, song. wisdom, prophecy, teaching, letter.

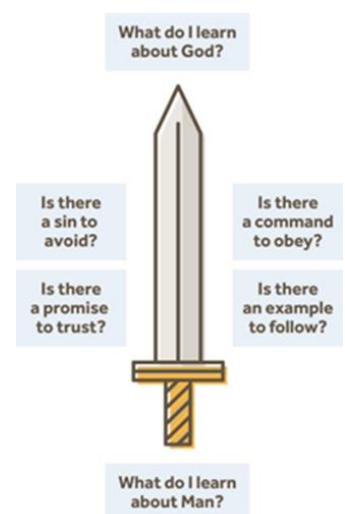
- When? (Historical) Is it in OT or NT? What was going on at the time? What had just happened?
- Where? (Cultural). The passage sits in a particular culture written by someone living in it and having particular cultural perspectives. Does this affect the meaning of the passage? When we read a passage, we all wear glasses whether we realise it or not. They colour what we read and see and affect the meaning. Of course, as well as our national culture we also have baggage that we bring to it – life experiences, prejudices, beliefs, upbringing etc. These all affect our understanding, which is why we need to study the bible corporately and preferably cross-culturally, which enriches our perspective and understanding.
- By whom? What do we know about the author? Where was he when he was writing the passage or speaking?
- Why? What is the meaning (do you think) of the passage for the audience at the time?

4. Application

James tells us in 1:22-25 to put into action what we have heard and learned. The purpose of reading and listening to God's word is to become wiser, more holy, more loving, and compassionate, more generous, have more faith, and live authentic Christ-like lives in God's kingdom so that we will be productive and fruitful for God's purposes.

Romans 13:4- *For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through the endurance taught in the Scriptures and the encouragement they provide we might have hope.*

Questions: what can I learn from the passage that I can apply to my life and obey? What does God want me to hear and understand? What does God want me to do? Does he want anything to change in my life? Is He putting gentle Holy Spirit pressure on an area of my life that needs to change? What is God showing me about Himself and how does this encourage me? Am I being challenged in any way to make a step of faith?



The Sword Method is a useful tool when reflecting on the meaning of Scripture for me/us today.

SWORD METHOD

Let's have a go!

1. One familiar passage is a good place to start - the **Parable of the Good Samaritan**.

Jesus often taught through parables. A parable is a story which illustrates a moral or spiritual lesson – it contains one or more teaching points.

Read The Good Samaritan story Luke 10:25-37

As we try to interpret the passage remember we are not 'a disembodied eye' as Leslie Newbiggin observed, looking down from 100,000 miles in space.⁵ As we have already seen each one of us is influenced by our particular context and the influences we have experienced. We need to substitute these for those of a first century setting to understand the message more fully.

- The key players in this passage are - The expert in the Law and Jesus.
- The key players in the parable are- the victim, who is attacked, probably a Jewish man, a Jewish priest, a Jewish Levite and a Samaritan

The parable is told to address the question posed by the expert in the Law: *What must I do to inherit eternal life?*

Jesus responded with a question - *What does the Law say?*

The expert responds: *Love the Lord your God with all your heart and soul and strength and your neighbour as yourself.*

Jesus congratulates him and says *yes do this and you will live (for eternity).*

But the expert asks further: *And who is my neighbour?*

This prompts Jesus to tell the story – which illustrates more than just *who is my neighbour* but *to whom must we become a neighbour?*

The reader needs to know certain things to understand the parable well:

- Samaritans were hated by the Jews and considered morally and spiritually unclean because they were mixed-race.
- The priest and Levite were returning from Jerusalem when they saw the potentially dead person. They were faced with a dilemma – if the person was Jewish, they would be forced to help him as a fellow Jew and that would have made them ceremonially unclean, and they would have had to return to the temple in Jerusalem to undergo a week's process of

⁵ Bailey K. E., *Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes* (Illinois Intersity Press, 2008) p.284

ceremonial purification. Meanwhile they could not eat from the tithes or collect them. It was much easier therefore to simply ignore the man and carry on their way. The Levite acted as assistant to a priest. Perhaps he saw the priest pass by on the other side and so followed his lead.

- The hated Samaritan however courageously responded in compassion and tended to the victim's wounds. He put him on his donkey travelling through dangerous Jewish territory and sought out an Inn where he paid for the man's stay. A Samaritan would not normally tarry in Jewish territory because Jewish marauding gangs threatened his safety. He showed real courage. Anyone seeing him with an enemy, an injured Jew, could have mistakenly thought he had inflicted the wounds himself. But he chose to take the risk because he felt mercy and compassion for the man.

The story highlights the limitations of the religious law which had become dominated by ceremonial rules and had lost the true message of God's kingdom of justice, righteousness and compassion.

It reveals the racial tensions of the time. But Israel was called to be a light to the nations and the Law commanded them to be kind to the stranger and foreigner.

Jesus deliberately chooses a hated Samaritan to be the hero of the story and the Priest and Levite to be the villains to challenge the wrong perceptions of the religious elite with regard to race, and what was true righteousness. Who reflected God in this story? Not the religious but the Samaritan because he acted with costly love and compassion and reminds us of Jesus.

Jesus is revealed as an expert teacher – responding to the religious teacher's question with more questions which leads to a fuller understanding of what faithfulness requires.

Application for us: We now need to apply the lessons to our own 21st particular context.

What does it mean for us?

2. Let's now look at a gospel story. When Jesus was passing through Jericho.

Read **The Story of Zaccheus Luke 19:1-10**

The main players are Zacchaeus, Jesus and the crowd. Zacchaeus we are told is a hated tax-collector, who is wealthy. Tax collectors were collaborators with the Roman enemy who were corrupt and considered 'turn coats'. We are told Zacchaeus wanted to see who Jesus was but because he was short, he ran to climb up a sycamore tree a distance out of the town. Jesus

passes through the town refusing local hospitality, because he is on his journey but then sees Zacchaeus up the tree.

- Firstly, for a wealthy prominent man to run anywhere and climb a tree was culturally shocking. He chooses a tree that has full foliage, because he obviously does not want to be seen. Remember he is hated, and now he is humiliatingly up a tree! This shows how desperate he was to see Jesus. (If you seek me with all your heart you will be found by me. Jeremiah 29:13)
- When Jesus stops at the tree and speaks to Zacchaeus the crowd hurled insults at him resenting the fact that Jesus was even bothering to speak with him. To then ask to stay at his house was both disappointing to the crowd, who had wanted him to stay in town and a provocative act of reconciliation.
- Jesus obviously did nothing unintentionally and he perhaps saw here an opportunity to reveal his kingdom of forgiveness, restoration and reconciliation. The vilified Zacchaeus was so overwhelmed to be asked to host Jesus at his house that his heart is dramatically changed. Kindness leads to repentance. He publicly repents and offers to repay all those he has cheated and give away half of his assets to the poor. His encounter with Jesus is not just a regular meeting with a guest but a moral and spiritual encounter with the living Lord, which is life and heart changing.

This is a salvation story - Jesus the Saviour declares 'Salvation has come to this house'.

This is a reconciliation story - Zacchaeus the oppressor is restored as a son of Abraham.

This is a peace-making story – Jesus reaches out to the hated collaborator and welcomes him into his kingdom.

Application *What do the lessons in this story teach us?*

3. OT example see - **Study of Nehemiah.**

