

Reformed University Fellowship

How to Study the Bible Conference

How To Study The Bible

- I. The Universal Study Process.
 - A. Three basic parts.
 - 1. Observation.
 - a. What is there? What does it say?
 - b. Gathering the facts.
 - 2. Interpretation.
 - a. What do these facts mean?
 - b. Understanding the facts.
 - 3. Application.
 - a. What can/should we do now?
 - b. Profiting from our study.
 - B. Used in any field of study.
 - C. Real examples.
 - 1. Genetics.
 - 2. Literature.
 - 3. Daily life.
 - a. Observe that the traffic light is red.
 - b. Interpret that to mean you should stop.
 - c. Apply your foot to the brake.
 - D. OIA is not so much a Bible study method, or even less the “RUF Bible Study Method” as it is a description of how we successfully relate to the world around us.
- II. Observation – What does it say?
 - A. Literary genre.
 - 1. Narrative (story).
 - a. History.
 - b. Parable.
 - c. Narrative is a series of events; the event is the main structural element.
 - 2. Discourse (command).
 - a. Epistles.
 - b. Sermons.
 - c. Proverbs.
 - d. Discourse is a series of propositions; the proposition is the main structural element.
 - 3. Poetry.
 - a. Psalms.
 - b. Prophets.
 - c. Song of Solomon.
 - d. Poetry is a series of images; the image is the main structural element.
 - B. Observing narratives.
 - 1. Focus on the events.
 - 2. Look for the facts within the events.
 - 3. Details: who, what, when, where, how.
 - 4. Clearly grasp the sequence of events.
 - 5. Notice the *stated* purpose or reason behind events.
 - 6. Notice the manner and method by which events occur.

- C. Observing discourse.
 - 1. Focus on the propositions.
 - 2. Look for the literary relationships within the propositions.
 - 3. Repetition of words and concepts.
 - 4. Contrast of words and concepts.
 - 5. Cause and effect.
 - 6. Progression of general to particular, particular to general.
 - 7. Note the particular words chosen.
 - 8. Note the structure of the sentences and the whole passage.
- D. Observing poetry.
 - 1. Focus on the images.
 - 2. Look for the parallelism.
 - 3. Repetition.
 - 4. Contrast.
 - 5. Comparison.
 - 6. Notice the use of metaphors, similes, and personification.
 - 7. Note the canonical use of the images.
 - 8. Note how the images are arranged to create the whole picture.
- E. General observation.
 - 1. Each genre will make some use of the characteristic elements of the others.
 - a. Narratives will contain repeated and contrasted words and ideas, and will use metaphors to describe people and events.
 - b. Discourse passages will use events and poems to illustrate and reinforce propositions.
 - c. Poetry will have historical events and propositions as their subjects.
 - 2. The basic genre of a passage is determinative in interpreting it.
 - a. Exodus and Numbers, not Psalm 106, determine the sequence of events in Israel's departure from Egypt.
 - b. Psalms determines how we ought to respond to that event.
 - 3. Always note the author and original audience, including their cultural setting.
 - 4. Always note references to other parts of scripture.

III. Interpretation – What does it mean?

- A. The goal of interpretation.
 - 1. To discover the main point of the passage.
 - 2. Not to decode secret messages or to clear up all possible ambiguities.
- B. Examine the parts: events, propositions, images.
 - 1. What is the overall meaning of this event, proposition, or image?
 - 2. Narrative interpretation.
 - a. Why did he do _____?
 - b. Why did _____ happen?
 - c. Why were _____ involved?
 - d. Was this event good or bad?
 - e. Why did the author include this event?
 - 3. Discourse interpretation.
 - a. Why was this word used?
 - b. Why was the sentence written this way?
 - c. Why did the author include this statement?
 - 4. Poetry interpretation.
 - a. Why is this metaphor/simile/personification used here?
 - b. What does the parallelism show us?
 - c. What response does this image evoke?
 - d. Why did the author include this image?

- C. Examine the relationship between the parts (within the passage).
 - 1. How are these events/statements/images connected to each other?
 - a. Repetition? Contrast? Intensification? Conclusion? Progression?
 - 2. What is the meaning of this repetition/contrast/etc.?
 - 3. Narrative: what events caused other events?
 - 4. Discourse: what propositions implied other propositions?
 - 5. Poetry: how do these images create a whole picture?
 - D. Determine the *main point* of the whole (passage).
 - 1. What is the meaning of the whole passage?
 - 2. The main point is *the primary timeless principle* revealed in this ancient text.
 - 3. Make a tentative decision about the main point.
 - 4. Test it against your initial conclusions (See III. A. and B.)
 - a. Ask “Does each verse contribute to the main point?”
 - b. If not, you may have a *secondary point*.
 - 5. Modify tentative main point.
 - 6. Test it again.
 - 7. Adopt final conclusion about the meaning of the whole passage.
 - 8. This is the author's *main point* of the passage.
- IV. Application – How does it apply to me?
- A. Flesh out in our 21st century context how the timeless principle of the main point works out.
 - B. New things to believe and remember – about God, man, the world, the church, etc.
 - C. New things to do.
 - D. Specific plan of obedience.
- V. Last words.
- A. Narrative passages tell us what other people did; they do not tell us what to do – we must figure out from the story which principles to apply to our lives.
 - 1. Luke 10:29-37 – What happened: Samaritan cared for the wounded traveler.
 - 2. Possible application – Help those stranded along the road.
 - B. Discourse passages tell us in general what to do – we are left to decide the specifics of applications.
 - 1. Romans 13:1 – General command: obey authorities.
 - 2. One specific – Pay your taxes.
 - C. Poetic passages paint pictures; they are more evocative than instructive, yet they do contain some commands – we must think about where we fit into the picture.
 - 1. Psalm 1 – Picture: The righteous are a strong tree, the unrighteous are chaff.
 - 2. Application – Are you righteous or unrighteous; fruitful or worthless?