

Effective Bible Study II

(By The Book)

The Bible is not a hodge podge of inspirational quips and quotes. It is a library of 66 books. Each of those individual books were written by a particular person, at a particular time and place in history for a particular purpose. It is not enough to learn some favorite verses or even chapters snatched from here and there. Nobody should consider themselves an accomplished Bible student who does not have some overall sense of what each book of the Bible is about.

This lesson will teach the skills needed to tackle a whole book of the Bible. This challenging approach is extremely rewarding to those who are willing to do the work. In, "*How to Read a Book*" Mortimer Adler identifies three essential steps to effectively reading any book. We will apply the principles to the Bible.

1.) Pigeonholing - is identifying what kind of book you are about to read. This is important because the Bible contains several different kinds of books.

Traditionally The Old Testament Is Broken Down Into These Five Types Of Literature:

- 1.) _____ Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy
- 2.) _____ Joshua, Judges, Ruth, I & II Samuel, I&II Kings, I&II Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther
- 3.) _____ Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon
- 4.) _____ Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi

Another way of looking at the Old Testament is to see it written in three distinct periods of history. *Genesis - Joshua*, Priestly books; *Judges - Song of Solomon*, Kingly books; *Isaiah - Malachi*, Prophetic books. God uses each to equip His people as Priests, Kings & Prophets.

The New Testament Consists Of Four Types Of Literature:

- 1.) _____ Matthew, Mark, Luke, John
- 2.) _____ Acts
- 3.) _____ or Letters (to churches or individuals) Romans Jude
- 4.) _____ Revelation

Before undertaking the study of any book of the Bible, it is generally helpful to find out **when** it was written, to **whom** it was written and for what general **purpose** it was written. This kind of background information can be found in most study Bibles, or Bible handbooks.

How to pigeonhole

The title sometimes gives insight into the kind of book you are dealing with.

Psalms - A book of songs and prayers.
Genesis - The title means *beginnings*.
Exodus - The title means *to go out or exit*.

The introductory or concluding section may give you a clue.

Proverbs - What does the intro say about its purpose? (1:1-7).
Luke - The author clearly explains his purpose (1:1-4).
Revelation - The prophetic nature is explained in the opening (1:1-3) and closing (22:6).

Sometimes you may have to skim over the entire book to gain a sense of its content.

2.) X-raying - after figuring out what kind of book you are dealing with, the next thing a skilled reader does is look for a *skeleton*. Every book comes clothed in many words, but within those pages is the skeleton or structure.

(It is often helpful to print out the book you are studying and delete all the chapter and verse divisions. Leave yourself a good sized margin for making notes.)

a.) Look for a Thesis or main theme the book is seeking to convey. Write down, *in your own words*, what the book's primary message seems to be. You will often discover the theme in the opening or closing sections:

Job - The prologue explains the book's purpose.
Ecclesiastes - Solomon says he is seeking the answer to the meaning of life.
John - The key to the book is found in 20:30-31.
Romans - 1:16 states the book's thesis.

b.) Outline the book. Identify the different sections within the book and describe their contribution to the book as a whole as well as how they relate to the other parts.

Outlining is saying, "The theme of this book is...The author accomplishes this in three major parts I. II. & III.. In part I, four points are made A. B. C. & D" and so on through the book.

You can find outlines of the books of the Bible in many study Bible s and handbooks, but NEVER begin your study with them. Instead, you should always read the book through (maybe several times) on your own and write down your own thesis and outline first. When we do our own work, imperfect as it may be, it will be of more and lasting benefit than skipping the process and looking at the most perfect outline prepared by someone else. There are great ah - ha moments awaiting those who will grind through this process. When you have satisfactorily completed this task, then feel free to seek out the work others have done and make revisions as you see fit.

Here is an example of a thesis and outline for the book of Colossians:

Colossians Outlined

Thesis: As the Father s agent of creation and redemption, Christ is preeminent over all things. Because we are *in Christ* we share in His glory and must do ALL our thinking and doing in terms of our position in Him.

Outline:

Part One: The Supremacy of Christ in the Church (1:1-2:23)

- I. Introduction 1:1-14
 - A. Paul's Greeting to the Colossians 1:1-2
 - B. Paul's Thanksgiving for the Colossians 1:3-8
 - C. Paul's Prayer for the Colossians 1:9-14

- II. The Preeminence of Christ 1:15-2:3
 - A. Christ Is Preeminent in Creation 1:15-18
 - B. Christ Is Preeminent in Redemption 1:19-23
 - C. Christ Is Preeminent in the Church 1:24-2:3

- III. The Freedom in Christ 2:4-23
 - A. Freedom from Enticing Words 2:4-7
 - B. Freedom from Vain Philosophy 2:8-10
 - C. Freedom from the Judgment of Men 2:11-17
 - D. Freedom from Improper Worship 2:18-19
 - E. Freedom from the Doctrine of Men 2:20-23

Part Two: The Submission to Christ in the Church (3:1-4:18)

- I. The Believer s Position In Christ 3:1-4

- II. The Practice of the Believer 3:5-4:6
 - A. Put Off the Old Man 3:5-11
 - B. Put On the New Man 3:12-17
 - C. Personal Commands for Holiness 3:18-4:6
 - 1. Holiness in Family Life 3:18-21
 - 2. Holiness in Work Life 3:22-4:1
 - 3. Holiness in Public Life 4:2-6

- III. Conclusion 4:7-18
 - A. Commendation of Tychicus 4:7-9
 - B. Greetings from Paul's Friends 4:10-14
 - C. Instructions Regarding This Letter 4:15-18

(from Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Copyright (c)1986, Thomas Nelson Publishers)

By the time you have worked up an outline, you will be familiar with the contours of the book. Outlining gives you handles with which to work with the book in greater detail as we will consider in the next lesson.

3.) Coming To Terms With The Author. This means recognizing the key words and phrases used by an author and assigning the same meaning to them as he does.

Every field of knowledge has its own peculiar vocabulary. The learning curve is mostly about recognizing what is meant by all these new words or special uses of ordinary words. Biology, Physics, Philosophy, Medicine, Engineering, Sailing, etc. all have their own unique and esoteric language. Outsiders are intimidated by the "big" words. The truth is, that specialist just spend a lot of time in their field conversing in their language. The Bible is no different. Be patient with yourself and keep on trying. Before you know it you'll be spouting words like propitiation, redemption and sanctuary like an old pro.

How To Come To Terms With The Author:

1. Identify key words.

- a. These words are often the ones that give you trouble as you read. When you come across a word or phrase that you don't understand - take note of it.
- b. Recurring words are often very important. Even simple words that keep recurring may have special significance. Mark them down!

2. Find out what the author means by these words.

- a. Context is the best means of coming to an common understanding with the author of his use of a word or phrase. You are basically solving a riddle, using what you do know to make sense of what you do not.
- b. Again, Bible handbooks and in this case Bible dictionaries are very helpful. They provide definitions to the words as they are used in scripture. They will also

cite several references where the word is used in scripture so you can look them up and see how they are used in different contexts.

c. The best reference tools will specifically address how the author uses a term in various places and how his usage may either refer to some earlier usage by a prior bible writer or how he may be using the term in a very different way.

Review: The rules for effectively reading a book are:

1. _____ the book according to kind. (Ask: Who, Where, When, Why)
2. Write a _____ Statement that briefly summarizes what the book is about.
3. _____ its major parts in their order and relation.
4. Come to _____ with the author by identifying and defining key words.

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| <p>If I had only four minutes to perform a life saving operation, I would take at least one minute to consider how best to do it. Dr. Auguste Nelaton</p> |
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The groundwork of getting a good handle on a Bible book will payoff down the road in helping you make good applications.

Sounds like work? All reading that expands your knowledge is hard work. Don't waste your brain by only reading stuff that tells you more about what you already know. Read things that make you think about ideas you've never considered - especially God's word.