The Bible is trustworthy.

(But are our interpretations?)
Three “Gears” of Bible Reading

Length: $\geq 1$ chapter
Benefits: the “big picture,” flow, themes

Length: 1 paragraph
Benefits: detail, depth

Length: 1 verse, paragraph, chapter
Benefits: worship, prayer
The Challenge of Interpreting the Bible

Notes:
OVERVIEW
Observation + Interpretation + Application

THEN & THERE
what it meant for the original reader

HERE & NOW
what it means for the modern reader

Notes:
OBSERVATION

AIM: ________________ the facts, whatever is ______________ in the text.

KEY QUESTION: WHAT DOES THE PASSAGE ______________ ?

GENERAL PRINCIPLES:

1) Read the Bible like ________________ book.

2) Start by letting the text speak ________________.

EXAMPLE Genesis 3:1 (“Details That Lead to Death”)
METHOD:

1) Read the passage _________ times carefully.

2) Ask lots of __________________!

3) __________, underline, or _________ key words/phrases.

4) _________ down what you've observed.
Mark 12:41-44 (NIV)

“Jesus sat down opposite the place where the offerings were put and watched the crowd putting their money into the temple treasury. Many rich people threw in large amounts. But a poor widow came and put in two very small copper coins, worth only a few cents.

“Calling his disciples to him, Jesus said, “Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything—all she had to live on.”
INTERPRETATION

AIM: _______________ the facts — understanding the main point or theme(s) in the passage.

KEY QUESTION: WHAT DOES THE PASSAGE ______________ ?

GENERAL PRINCIPLES:

1) Look for what the ________ and ________ had in mind.

2) The best interpreter of Scripture is ____________ itself.

EXAMPLE John 15:7 (“Every Prayer Answered?”)

3) ______________ (“with-the-text”) is king!

EXAMPLE Philippians 4:13 (“A Promise of Unlimited Ability?”)
INTERPRETATION (cont.)

4) Every passage must be viewed in light of ______________.

**EXAMPLE** 1 Samuel 17 (“Brave Like David?”)

**EXAMPLE** 1 Corinthians 13:4 (“Love Impossibly”)

**METHOD:**

1) Review your observations. Start to ask: ______________?

2) Interpret the parts and the whole of the passage in ______________.

3) ______________ any unclear words or details in the passage.
INTERPRETATION (cont.)

4) Start drawing tentative ____________________.

5) Consider how the passage relates to the _________ of Jesus Christ.

6) Fine-tune your conclusions by considering what ________________ of the Bible says about the main theme(s)/topic(s) in your passage.

Exercise!
APPLICATION

AIM: _______________ to the passage—benefiting from it personally.

KEY QUESTION: HOW DOES THE PASSAGE RELATE TO _____ TODAY?

GENERAL PRINCIPLES:

1) Read the Bible like _______________ book.

2) Applications should be ___________ in and ___________ by your interpretation of the passage.

3) Different literary ___________ apply to us differently.
APPLICATION (cont.)

**METHOD:**

1) Re-read your interpretative conclusions.

2) Consider what you ___________________ with those to whom (audience), about whom (subject), or by whom (author) the passage was written.

3) Write down your applications. Be as __________ and __________ as possible.

4) Do it.

**Exercise!**
Appendix A

SUMMARY OF METHOD

Observe

1. Read the passage several times carefully.
2. Ask lots of questions.
3. Circle, underline, or “emoji” key words/phrases.
4. Write down what you’ve observed.

Interpret

1. Review your observations. Start to ask: “So what?”
2. Read in context.
3. Investigate any unclear words/details.
4. Draw tentative conclusion.
5. Consider how the passage relates to Jesus.
6. Look at what other parts of the Bible say about the same topic.

Apply

1. Re-read your interpretations.
2. Consider how the original audience would’ve “applied” the passage.
3. Any clear/direct applications? Underlying principles?
4. Be specific and personal! Respond!
Appendix B

METHODOLOGICAL PRESUPPOSITIONS

*If these things aren’t true, this method (observation, interpretation, application) wouldn’t make sense:*

1. God has revealed himself personally through his written Word—through human languages, in human cultures, in a particular time in human history.

2. Scripture is “co-authored” by human writers and God the Holy Spirit. The words of the Bible are both human and divine.

3. Because the Bible is “inspired” by God, we can arrive at a true understanding of, and proper response to, the Bible only with the help of the Holy Spirit. The Bible cannot be understood by human means alone.

4. Because the Bible is “inspired” by God, (“breathed-out by God”), it is absolute in its authority over our beliefs and behavior.

5. The ultimate goal of understanding scripture is personal transformation, not gathering information.

6. All 66 books in the Christian canon have a common author, namely, the Holy Spirit. There is, therefore, coherence in meaning, purpose, and authority across the entirety of the Bible.

7. The Bible is first and foremost a story about God—his search for us and what he has done for us in Christ. Jesus is centerpiece of the Bible.

8. Despite cultural and historical discontinuities between the ancient and modern world, three fundamental continuities give Scripture continued relevance for today: (1) the continuity of God (his unchanging nature and character), (2) the continuity of humanity (our continuing imaging of God and need for redemption because of sin), and (3) the continuity of redemption (the one true gospel of grace offered to all peoples).
Appendix C

PERSONAL DEVOTIONS (QUIET TIME)

As with any relationship, the only way your relationship with Jesus will grow is if you spend time with him. The primary means that God provides for this kind of personal time with God is the Bible and prayer. (The sacraments, i.e., baptism and the Lord’s Supper, are another.) There are many different ways you can use God’s Word and prayer for your growth—the important thing is that you do so! Here is one simple approach that can be adapted to your personal needs and personality.

I. PREPARATION

1. **Settle down your mind and heart as best as you can.** Sometimes the circumstances aren’t perfect (e.g., you’re on the metro, on your lunch break, or nursing a baby). Nevertheless, God will meet you where you are!

2. **Spend a brief moment in prayer.** Recite to yourself the promises of the gospel, which give us confidence to approach God (Rom. 5:1-2; 8:15). Ask God to meet with you and to open your heart to his Word and presence. (You might use the words of Psalm 119:18 or Psalm 90:14).

II. STUDY

1. **Read a paragraph in the Bible (a few times).** It may benefit you the most for you to move slowly and consecutively through a chapter or book of the Bible, rather than skipping around the Bible randomly.

2. **Spend a few minutes seeking to understand the main themes of the passage.** You may run through an abbreviated form of the study method introduced in this course. Or you may simply reflect upon one of the following set of questions. Write down your thoughts or simply reflect:

   1. What does this passage tell you about God/Christ, yourself, or the world?
   2. Are there any examples to follow or avoid, commands to obey, promises to claim?

   1. Summarize the passage in your own words.
   2. What are some key themes that connect with your life? What needs to change?

   1. What key truth or verse (in context) struck you?
   2. Restate the verse in your own words.
   3. Give 2-3 reasons this helps you today.

3. **You may read a corresponding passage from a “devotional” guide or book.** But this should never replace your time in God’s Word itself!

III. MEDITATION

Meditation is a blend of Bible study and prayer. It involves praying the truth you just studied deep into your soul until it ‘catches fire,’ i.e., starts to make personal connections with you personally in a way that shapes your thoughts, moves your feelings, and changes your actions.

1. **Consider 1 or 2 of the main takeaways from your study time (above).** Keep it simple. Meditation usually entails “gnawing” on a single “nugget,” not devouring a whole meal.

2. **Reflect on one of the following questions:** How can I praise God for what this reveals about Him? Does my life demonstrate that I am remembering and acting based upon this truth? What wrong behavior, emotions, or attitudes result in me when I forget he is like this? What sins do I need to confess in light of this? Why is God showing me these particular things today? What do I need to do or become in light of this?

IV. PRAYER

1. **Pray over the things that came out of your time of meditation.** Praise him for the things you saw. Confess sins that you saw. Acknowledge your need for his grace in order to be obedient.

2. **This can also be a good time to pray through other needs you’re aware of**—whether your own, or those of others, the city, and the world.
Appendix D

LITERARY TYPES AND GENRES

Narrative (Stories)

- Basic unit: Event
- Structure: Series of events (this happened, then this happened)
- Genres:

  **HISTORY:** (OT) Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus (parts), Numbers, Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1-2 Samuel, 1-2 Kings, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, Job
  (NT) Acts

  **GOSPELS:** Matthew, Mark, Luke, John

  **PARABLES:** sections within Matthew, Mark, Luke, John

Discourse (Teaching)

- Basic unit: Proposition (truth statement)
- Structure: Series of propositions connected by logical relationships

  **LETTERS:** Romans, 1-2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1-2 Thessalonians, 1-2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon, Hebrews, James, 1-2 Peter, 1-3 John, Jude

  **SERMONS:** Jesus’ teachings in Matthew, Mark, Luke, John

  **LAW:** sections of Exodus (e.g., Ten Commandments), Leviticus, Numbers (parts), Deuteronomy (parts)

  **WISDOM:** Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Job

Poetry and Prophecy

- Basic unit: Image
- Structure: Stanzas connected by parallel or contrasting images

  **POETRY:** Psalms, Song of Songs, Lamentations

  **PROPHETS:** Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi

  **APOCALYPTIC:** Revelation, portions of Daniel, Ezekiel
Appendix E

RECOMMENDED READING

Bible Translations

**New International Version (NIV, 2011)** — Its thought-for-thought translational approach provides a wonderfully readable and comprehensible translation for the modern reader of a range of ages and educational backgrounds. In an effort to make a phrase more understandable, the translation will occasionally over-elaborate (paraphrase) rather than leave the job of interpretation to the reader.

**English Standard Version (ESV)** — Its word-for-word translational approach (which attempts to reflect nuances of grammar, syntax, and idiom in the original languages) yields a rich translation, yet one that is sometimes harder to read (e.g., longer sentences, complex grammatical structure, older English diction). This is a strong translation for in-depth Bible study.

Study Bibles

**NIV Zondervan Study Bible (2015)** — NIV Bible with verse-by-verse study notes that clarify the meaning of the text. Helpful charts, introductions to each book of the Bible, theological articles, and thorough concordance. For most, this is the main/only supplementary resource (“commentary”) you will need for your personal study of Scripture. Online version also available.

**ESV Study Bible** — Similar features and benefits as those listed for the NIV Zondervan Study Bible, but based on the ESV translation. The ESV Study Bible’s notes and article tend to be based on a slightly more theologically Reformed perspective.

Interpreting the Bible


R.C. Sproul, *Knowing Scripture*. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1977. 125pp. [Summary of theological principles that guide our interpretation. Provides material that would fit under the “Principles” sections of this seminar.]


Learning the Bible’s “Big Picture”


Kevin DeYoung, *The Biggest Story: How the Snake Crusher Brings Us Back to the Garden*. Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2015. 132pp. [Also a children’s book—hey, sometimes clear and simple is best!—that provides a good overview of the main themes of the whole Bible.]
Vaughan Roberts, *God’s Big Picture: Tracing the Storyline of the Bible*. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 2002. 160pp. [Helpful introduction to the “big picture” story of the Bible. Uses a slightly idiosyncratic approach, but grasping the storyline of Scripture takes repetition and views from all sorts of angles. And it’s a quick read!]

**Bible Commentaries**  
*For more in-depth study of a specific book of the Bible*


*The Bible Speaks Today or God’s Word For You (Good Book Company) commentaries — These are two book-by-book commentary series that are designed for use by “ordinary” Christian readers in the church (e.g., helpful for small group Bible study preparation). Provides a good mixture of technical insights and life application.*

**Online Bible**

*Bible Gateway: biblegateway.com — Bible text provided in numerous translation. Also helpful for comparing multiple translations side-by-side. Bible app also available.*

**Concordance**

*Nave’s Topical Bible: biblestudytools.com/concordances — helpful for cross-referencing a specific word or topic, for example, “Where else does the Bible talk about money? Where else does it use the word servant?”*

**Encyclopedia**

*International Standard Bible Encyclopedia: biblestudytools.com/encyclopédias — helpful for learning the historical, cultural, and geographical background to details in your passage, for example, “What was the ark of the covenant?” or “What was the city of Corinth like”*