

Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

How to Study the Bible

Scripture: Selected Scriptures

Code: 1382

This morning we touched on the fact that there are some requirements for those who would glean from the Word what God would have us to know. The Bible is not an open Book to just anybody. It is an open Book only to those who come fulfilling certain basic requirements. And we talked about the who of Bible study, who can really understand the Bible. And we suggested to you six principles, really, a five and then a sixth, which was prayer. A person must be born again, must be diligent in his study, have a great desire, must deal with sin in his life so that there's manifest holiness, and the filling of the Spirit of God, who really is our teacher.

And as you've examined your life if you understand those priorities and are willing to commit yourself to those priorities and bathe all of those in prayer, then you're the person who can understand the Bible. You're the person to whom God will open the pages of His Book and give you the truth.

Now I agree that even the unregenerate man may understand a little bit about the history in the Bible. He may understand a few of the words in the Bible. But he'll never have a Biblical knowledge in the sense that it works out in his living. He may get some head knowledge by reading, and understanding, and studying to a certain degree, but it'll never be the real kind of knowledge that the Bible talks about because it never works out in his life.

And so what we're talking about is the fact that unless you fit the qualifications, the Bible never comes alive in your living, and so consequently in the Hebrew mind you never really perceive it at all. You never really understand it until it takes place in your life on a day to day basis.

Now, given the who of Bible study, let's look at the how tonight. And it's so hard to know where to begin with this incomparable Book. I don't know if you've ever really thought about the magnificence of the Bible and what a privilege we have in studying it, but I hope for tonight at least you'll be able to focus in on some of the tremendous things that await you in the Scripture as you break it open.

I read some time ago an architect's view of the Bible and I wanted to share it with you, just as a beginning. "The Bible is like a magnificent palace constructed of precious oriental stone, comprising 66 stately chambers. Each one of these rooms is different from its fellows and is perfect in its individual beauty, while together they form an edifice incomparable, majestic, glorious, and sublime. In the Book of Genesis, we enter the vestibule where we are immediately introduced to the records of the mighty works of God in creation. This vestibule gives access to the law courts, passing through

which we come to the picture gallery of the historical books. Here we find hung on the wall scenes of battles, heroic deeds, and portraits of valiant men of God.

“Beyond the picture gallery we find the philosophers chamber, the Book of Job, passing through which we enter the music room, the Book of Psalms, and here we linger thrilled by the grandest harmonies that ever fell on human ears. And then we come to the business office, the Book of Proverbs, in the very center of which stands the motto, ‘righteousness exalteth a nation but sin is a reproach to any people.’

“Leaving the business office we pass into the research department, Ecclesiastes. Then into the conservatory, the Song of Solomon where greet us the fragrant aroma of choicest fruits and flowers and the sweetest singing of birds. When we reach the observatory, where the prophets with their powerful telescopes are looking for the appearing of the Bright and Morning Star, prior to the dawning of the Son of Righteousness.

“Crossing the courtyard, we come to the audience chamber of the King, the gospels, where we find four life-like portraits of the King Himself, revealing the perfections of His infinite beauty. And next we enter the workroom of the Holy Spirit, the book of Acts, and beyond the correspondence room, the epistles where we see Paul, and Peter, and James, and John, and Jude, busy at their tables under the personal direction of the Spirit of truth.

“And finally we enter the throne room, the Book of Revelation, and there we are enraptured by the mighty volume of adoration and praise addressed to the enthroned King which fills the vast chamber. While in the adjacent galleries and judgment hall there are portrayed solemn scenes of doom and wondrous scenes of glory associated with the coming manifestation of the King of kings and the Lord of lords.”

A quick trip through the Scripture. Oh, the majesty of this Book, from the creation to the culmination. How it behooves us to be diligent in our study.

How do we go about it? Number one, how do we really understand the Bible? Point one, read the Bible. Simple enough. Read the Bible. This is where Bible study begins, with reading, and frankly a lot of people never quite get to this point. They nibble. They never really read it. They read a lot about it, maybe, in books here and there, but they don't really read the Bible, and there is no substitute for reading the Scripture.

We must be totally committed to reading it. That's where it all begins. And my suggestion to people is that you try to read through the Bible once a year. First of all, we'll use the Old Testament as - I'm referring there to the Old Testament. You start with the Old Testament. Try to read through it once a year. There are 39 books and if you read about 20 minutes a day - give or take a few, depending on

how rapidly you read - you can usually get through the Old Testament in one year.

I remember in seminary Dr. Feinberg who was a great mentor of mine and a wonderful man of God who knew so much about the Old Testament it used to just baffle the students, see? One of the students would try to trap him sometime and say to him, "Dr. Feinberg, what's in First Kings 7:34?" Just pulling one out of the air. He'd sort of mumble it in his mind in Hebrew, translate it and tell us what was there.

He said to me one day, he said, "I try to read a book a day just to keep up on things." I said, "What kind of a book?" "Any book. A book on art, a book on history, a book on somebody's life, any book. One a day so that I can stay up with things." I said to him one day, I said, "With all of your reading a book a day and all of your study of the Hebrew, and writing commentaries, and teaching a full load of classes, do you have time to read the Bible?" And he says, "I read the Bible. I read through the Bible four times a year, and I have for I don't know how many years."

That's where it all begins, people, and there's no substitute for reading the Bible. Start with the Old Testament and just read it through. Now the Hebrew language is a very simple language. It doesn't have the lofty concepts of Greek thinking. It isn't a theoretical language. It isn't a conceptual language. It isn't a philosophical language with a lot of abstraction. It's a very simple, very concrete language.

In fact, as a student in seminary I found the study of Hebrew infinitely easier than the study of Greek. It is just not a complex language for the most part, and it relates things in very concrete and simple terms. And so you can read through the flow and the narrative of the Old Testament for the most part just at one sitting, just progressing through, and each year going back through again and again the Old Testament and, and begin to build a comprehension as you read.

And I would suggest that as you read the Bible you mark in the margin a notation where you don't understand what it's talking about. And if you'll do that you'll find a very interesting thing will happen. You'll start out with a whole lot of things, and as time goes on you can begin to check them off your margin because as you read and reread, and as you progress from Genesis to Malachi, you will find an understanding that will become yours, and that'll answer some of those questions that you had.

The ones you don't answer in your reading you can use for individual study in a commentary or another source to get the meaning. But begin by just reading it. Don't be overwhelmed. Oh, how can I learn it all? How can I take care of every verse? Just begin and read through the Old Testament. And that's my suggestion that you do that every year, at least once a year.

Now when you come to the New Testament, I have a different little plan, and I've shared this with you, but I'll give it to you again, for reading the New Testament. And by the way, I think the major

thrust should be to read the New Testament. I really believe that, and it's based upon Scripture. In Colossians, for example, 1:24 Paul says - verse 25 rather, "that he was made a minister, according to the dispensation of God which is given to me for you, to fulfill the word of God; Even the mystery hidden from ages and from generations, now made manifest." In other words Paul says, "I'm called by God to give to you the mystery that's been hidden."

Now the mystery, basically, is the New Testament revelation. And Paul says, "I am an apostle of the mystery," in Ephesians chapter 3. So that the major thrust of his ministry was the new revelation. And he would allude to the Old Testament insofar as it illustrated, and elucidated, and supported the New. And so the message of the New Testament is the culmination of revelation. It is that which embodies and engulfs all that is the Old, and includes all that is the New. And so, in a sense the New Testament will summarize for you the Old Testament, as well as lead you further to the fullness of revelation.

So when you read the New you must spend more time, for it explains the Old. And it is because it is written in Greek, a much more complex, perhaps more difficult in many cases to understand - in some not always the case, but in most cases it's a little harder because of its abstractions, because it talks in concepts rather than narrative stories.

And so we have to give ourselves to a greater diligence to study the New Testament. Now here's how I've done it, and I started this when I was in seminary. I started with 1 John, and I decided that I'd read 1 John everyday for 30 days. And that's, I believe, the way to do it. The first day you just read 1 John. And for many people to sit down and read 1 John, when they did that they found that was the first time they ever read a whole book all the way through. Many people feel the Bible is just a collection of verses.

You know, I remember when I was a kid we had a plastic box on our kitchen table with verses stuck in it. Our daily bread thing kind of deal, and you could stick them in any order you wanted, it didn't matter. You'd just pull them out. There's a good one. Oh, there's a terrific verse. And you could just pull them out and throw them up in the air, and put them back in any order you wanted.

But that's not the way the Bible was written. When a book begins, it begins somewhere and when it ends, it ends somewhere, and in the meantime it's going there. And most people never read with flow. You need to learn to read a book. And so you sit down and you read 1 John. It takes you 25 or 30 minutes, unless you're in remedial reading, and then no telling how long it'll take you. But anyway, if you're taking Evelyn Wood's course you can go like this four or five times and you're done.

But the idea is to read it through the first day. Second day, read it through. Third day, read it through. Fourth day, read it through. Fifth day, read it through. You just sit down and read it. Now about the seventh or eighth day you're going to start saying to yourself, "You know, this is getting old. I've got this stuff pretty well under my belt." But that's the tough part. You push through that and about 15 or

16 days, it used to kind of hit me, well, I got this stuff, I'd push through a little farther. And I remember when I hit the 30th day on 1 John I said, "I don't quite understand this book." And I went 90 days before I finished. Ninety days of reading 1 John straight through.

Now, after 30 days, if you'll just stick with 30, you'll have a tremendous comprehension of that book. If someone says to you, you know, "Where in the Bible does it say if we confess our sins, He's faithful and just?" You'll say, "Oh, that's easy. First John chapter 1, left hand page, right hand column, halfway down." Because you'll be able to visualize that. You'll be able to literally see that in your mind.

People always ask me, "Why do you still use the King James? Why don't you move to the New American or the New International?" Because I visualize my Bible. I find things by where they are in my vision. In other words, my mind has taken a mental picture of a page and I can tell you, I may not remember the chapter everywhere in the Bible, but I can just about tell you where on the page everything is. People give me a new Bible and I am lost. I could wind up a Mormon if I changed Bibles. I can't find anything in another Bible.

So the thing you want to do is to, is to read a book through 30 times, and at the end of that 30 times you will really have that book in your mind. Now basically this is what I do all the time as I prepare message, is I just read through, and read through, and read through until the whole book just falls into my mind, in a visual kind of a perception that I see with my mind's eye.

Now while I'm doing this I - this is a thing I would suggest also - take a little three by five card and write down the major theme of each chapter, the major theme of each chapter, okay? Now as you do that, you just write it on a card, every day when you read the book, just look at that card and run through that list. And what'll happen is you'll learn the content of chapters. You'll begin to learn what's in chapters.

Now, you say, "I've finished 1 John for thirty days. Now where do I go?" Now I would suggest you go to a large book in the New Testament. Remember all the time you're just reading the narrative of the Old, just reading it through 20 minutes a day. But now you go to a larger book, and I suggest that you go from 1 John to the gospel of John. You say, "But that's 21 chapters."

That's right. So you divide it into three sections. Read the first 7 for 30 days, the second 7 for 30 days and the third 7 for 30 days. So at the end of those 90 days you have pretty well read through and mastered the content of the gospel of John. And by the way, you've also had a little 3 by 5 card on the first 7 chapters, the second 7, and the third 7, because there are 21, and so you've memorized the major theme of each chapter.

Now I remember when I started doing this it was really amazing how fast I began to retain the things in the New Testament. I always wanted to be sure that I didn't wind up a concordance cripple, going around never being able to find anything in the Bible and having to look everything up in the back. Where is that verse? And so I wanted to learn these things and so I did the gospel of John after I did 1 John. And you know what? To this day and from when I taught it, too, the gospel of John, 1 John, these other books in the New Testament have stuck in my mind.

I think about the gospel of John and I think about chapter - somebody says to me, you know, "Where is Jesus and the vine?" Chapter 15. The good Shepherd? Chapter 10. Lazarus? Chapter 11. The arrest of Jesus? Chapter 18. Jesus' conversation with His brothers? Chapter 7. Eat My flesh and drink My blood? Chapter 6. The bread of life? Chapter 6. The marriage at Cana? Chapter 2. The woman at the well? Chapter 4. Nicodemus? Chapter 3. And it goes on and on, the judgment of the good and the evil? Chapter 5 verse 28, 29, right hand page halfway down, left column, right there, see? I know in my mind where all of that is. And it just fits in.

People say, "Oh, what a scholar." Listen, I read it 90 times, right? I read it 90 times. And this is how you learn, you see? Isaiah says, you learn line upon line, line upon line, precept on precept, precept on precept, here a little and there a little. When you're going to study for a test You don't pick up your book and read through the notes once, shut it, and say, "Ah, I got that." Not if you're normal. Not if you're like me. You learn by repetition, repetition, repetition. That's the way to learn the Bible.

And then you might want to go to Philippians, and you might want to learn the Book of Philippians, another short book. And then you might want to go back to Matthew, and then back to Colossians, and then back to Acts, and divide it up like that and back and forth, a small and a large book. You say, "But it's going to take a long time." No, in approximately two and a half years you will have finished the New Testament. That's pretty great.

Now you're going to read the Bible anyway, you might as well read it so you can remember it. Most people say, "Well, I have my daily devotions, and I read my passage for the day." And you say to them, "Well, what was it?" "Um, let's see. Um - " Well, what about a couple, three days ago? Uh, hopeless. I can barely remember yesterday.

You can't really retain anything by moving that fast. You must go over it, and over it, and over it. And if you believe it's a living Word it'll come alive in your life as you read it in a repetitious manner. Now if somebody said to me, you know, read the newspaper that way, or read some novel that way, I'd say I'm not interested. But this is living truth, and it has a productive effect on your life when it's read repetitiously.

You know if a great Hebrew scholar like Dr. Feinberg reads through the Old Testament and the New Testament four times a year, what must I need to do? I think about John Wesley, who got up every

morning of his life at 4:00 in the morning, get this, and read the Scripture in five different languages so that he might enjoy every possible nuance on the scripture that he was reading. And he did it for three hours or so every single morning of his life.

I remember when I was in London I went to his church and a man took us up a little winding staircase into a little tiny room where he went every morning, and there lying on the desk were his glasses, little tiny glasses, and his little tiny Greek New Testament and a couple of other books, the very ones that John Wesley had spent reading every morning of his life at 4:00. And I think it's where it all begins in Bible study, right there.

Now some people say, "Well, should you read it in the same version?" Well, generally yes. Stick with the same version so you have familiarity. Once in awhile I think it's good to stick in another version, just to kind of elucidate it. I normally read of course in the King James, but just for my own edification I'll read invariably the N.A.S. passage or the N.I.V. Passage, New International Version, those two, I think, are the best available comparison translations.

And this is where you have to begin. Now that's a simple method and that's all I'm going to say about it because I think it's pretty obvious. Just flow, reading through the Old Testament. You can read from Genesis to Malachi or you can follow some other format that you may have, a little reading schedule or whatever. But in the New Testament, read repetitiously.

And by the way, as a little footnote, it really will help you also if you read the book that I'm preaching on when I'm preaching on it. Now you can't always do that because you may go through it in thirty days and it takes me four years. But at some point in time, when I begin to read a book, or begin to teach a book, that's a good time for you to begin to read it.

Now what question does this answer? Reading the Bible answers this question: What does the Bible say? And we need to know that. What does the Bible say? Well, in order to find out what it says, you need to read it, and then you find out exactly what it says.

Now I'll tell you another interesting thing that happens - and this is just a footnote - but when you begin to read the Bible, just reading it, just reading it, you will find that your comprehension will increase in an incredible fashion. Because the Bible explains the Bible.

Now I don't know if you've analyzed my preaching. I know you've probably criticized it as to good, bad or indifferent, probably have a one to ten scale at home on Sunday afternoon, but basically if you analyze my preaching - and this is the secret. I'm giving it away, folks, right here. Basically what I do is explain the Bible with another part of the Bible. That's invariably what I do. Now you know and you can follow how I do that.

And what got me onto this was when a dear man told me one time if I wanted to have a rich ministry, he said, "Here's one book you've got to have," and he gave me a copy of a book called *The Treasury of Scripture Knowledge*. That little book is a book that goes through all the verses of the Bible and give you cross reference verses that explain the meaning of that text. Now you thought I had all that stuff in my head, see? That little book was a tremendous thing.

This man said to me, "You take your Bible and that little book and you can preach till you die." And it's a tremendous tool. Why? Because it uses the Bible to explain the Bible. And that's what happens when you read. So you're reading over in 1 John, and then you read in the gospel of John, and you say, "Hey, now I understand what he means in 1 John because that matches up with John chapter 5." Or you're reading in Philippians, you say, "Now I understand that because it's explained here. Well, now I know what he means by that concept over there because I see it over here."

And as you're flowing through the Old Testament, like we've seen, for example, we talked about divorce, right? Matthew 5:31, "You have heard it said that when a man divorces his wife let him give her the divorcement papers or do the paperwork, but I say unto you if any man divorces his wife for any other cause than fornication he commits adultery," etc, etc. And now you're reading along in the Old Testament, you come to Deuteronomy chapter 24, and there you find exactly what Jesus is referring to.

Or you're reading along, for example, in John chapter 3 and you say to yourself, "You must be born of the water and the Spirit? What is he talking about? The water and the Spirit?" And somebody comes along and says, "Well, the water refers to the water sac around the baby when the baby's born. You have to be physically born and spiritually born." No, because the Hebrews didn't call that a water sac. That's English. You say, "Well what does it mean, the water and the Spirit?" At the same time you're reading through Ezekiel, you come to chapter 36 and you find that Ezekiel says there's coming a day when men are going to be born by the water and the Spirit. Ah-ha. Now we understand, the water is the Word and the Spirit is the Holy Spirit. And Ezekiel will explain John 3.

So that when you begin to read the Bible you're going to find a lot of the gaps being filled in because you can understand it. And by the way, I tell people this all the time, God did not write a book to trip you up. This is not a book that's supposed to be some kind of hidden truth. This is not a secret book where you say, "Ha ha, God, I discovered what You're trying to say here." No. You're supposed to.

And people say, "Oh, whatever you do, don't read the Book of Revelation. Oh, that book is so confusing." Well, it says in 1:3, "Happy is the one who reads, and they that hear the words of this prophecy." Not that tough. But I'll tell you one thing, you'll never understand Revelation unless you're reading through Daniel, and Isaiah, and Ezekiel. And so as you just flow through, it all begins to come together, and if you will just read the Word of God it's amazing what production will take place in your

life.

All right, second principle. First one is to read the Bible. The second one is to interpret the Bible, to interpret the Bible. Now some people don't interpret the Bible, they just apply it. They go right from reading it to applying it without ever interpreting it. They don't bother to find out what it means. They just whiz along. Now the first issue, read the Bible, will answer the question what does the Bible say? The second point, interpret the Bible, answers the question what does the Bible mean by what it says? We read the Bible. Oh, that's wonderful. It says that. What does it mean by what it says? And we have to interpret.

Now you have to interpret the Bible. You can't take the Bible like an aspirin. It's not a tablet. People always say, "Well, I had my devotions and I was just reading along and oh, you know, I just decided well this means - " No, you have to know what it means. Remember the Ethiopian eunuch reading in Isaiah? And Philip comes along and he says to him, "Do you understand what you're reading?" And he says, "How can I understand it unless somebody guides me? I can't understand it. I mean I read a verse - "

For example, you're coming along here and you're reading in Colossians, let's say, and you read, "And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he made alive together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses; Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, he took it out of the way, nailed it to the cross; Having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it. Let no man therefore, judge you in food, or drink." Huh?

Somebody will say, "Oh, there's the word 'trespass' and there's the word 'forgive.' Isn't it wonderful He's forgiven our sins?" And that's as far as you'll ever go if you don't learn what the rest of it means. And a lot of preaching like that. They just read through a long - you ever heard a preacher just read through verse, after verse, after verse, and then find one word he understands and preach for an hour on it, and never tell you what it means in the passage? It's like one guy said, "First I read the text, and then I depart from the text, and thirdly I never come back."

In Nehemiah 8:1, very interesting. "And all the people gathered themselves together as one man into the street that was before the water gate; and they spoke unto Ezra the scribe to bring the book of the law of Moses, which the Lord had commanded to Israel." All right. They're going to bring the book, get the law of God. "And Ezra the priest brought the law before the congregation of men and women, and all who could hear with understanding, upon the first day of the seventh month. And he read it facing the street that was before the water gate from morning until midday." Now that's where it all begins. You have to read the Bible. He just stood up and read it, just read it.

“And the ears of the people *were attentive* unto the book of the law.” Verse 5. “Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people; and when he had opened it, all the people stood up. And Ezra blessed the Lord, the great God. And all the people answered, Amen, Amen, lifted up their hands: bowed their heads, and worshiped the Lord with *their* faces to the ground.” In other words, in responding to the reading they just worshiped the Lord. But then verse 8 is the key. “So they read in the book in the law of God distinctly - ” read distinctly. Then it says, “and they gave the sense, and caused *them* to understand the reading.”

You know, I had occasion this year to be at the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy, and these great scholars from around America, 250 or so of them, had come together and they were going to reaffirm to the whole wide world that every word of God is pure, as Proverbs 30 says. They were going to affirm to the whole world that the Bible is the absolute truth of God. It is inerrant in every word. And for four days they gave papers, erudite papers, that I couldn't even understand. Just, you know, tremendous scholarship, and they were pouring out this volume of stuff, and we were carrying around these monstrous notebooks with these terrific theological papers in them and great scholarship. And they were talking about how important it is that we uphold that every word in the Bible is true.

And I had seminar at the end of the conference, and my seminar was How Does Inerrancy Relate to the Ministry of the Church? And I said this. It is amazing to me that in a conference on inerrancy where everybody is stressing how important is every word in the Bible, nobody has given an expository message, which deals with every word. In other words why are we fighting for every word if we never bother to teach every word or to learn what they mean? It's not enough to just say, “We believe every word is true.” And then pick one word out of 45 verses and preach a sermon on that one word. That's why the only ultimate end of a true commitment to the inerrancy of Scripture is exposition of it, as it is given by God.

So we have to come to what does the Bible mean by what it says? And I really think that in many ways that's the key to the growth of Grace Church. I think people have responded in much - many other reasons, but one of the major ones - people have responded to finally finding out what the Bible means by what it says. They've been in the dark for so long, and we just kind of cracked the door, and, you know, it isn't that tough to open it because God has given us His Word to understand and His Spirit to be our teacher.

In 1 Timothy 4:13, Paul tells Timothy how to preach. This is what he says. “Till I come, give attendance - ” or give your attention to “ - reading, exhortation, and doctrine.” Now you know what he's saying? Now listen to this. He is saying, “Read the text, doctrine, explain the text, exhortation, apply the text. You don't just read it and apply it, you read it, then explain it, then apply it. Now that's really what rightly dividing the Word is all about.

And remember what I told you in the divorce sermon how the Pharisees had gotten themselves in trouble because they misinterpreted Deuteronomy 24. Misinterpretation is the mother of mania, frankly, of all sorts and kinds. For example, let me give you some things that are being taught today based on misinterpretation. Since the patriarchs practiced polygamy, so must we. That's what some are teaching. Here's another one. Since the Old Testament sanctioned the divine right of the King of Israel, all kings have divine rights. We went through that in the Middle Ages.

Since the Old Testament sanctioned the death of witches, we should be killing witches. Because some Old Testament plagues were from God, we should all avoid sanitation so as not to thwart Him. How about this one? Because the Old Testament teaches that women suffer in childbirth as a divine punishment no anesthetic should ever be used. Now those are all misinterpretations. Somebody doesn't understand what the Bible is really saying, doesn't understand the situation in which it was written.

Now it isn't easy to understand all of this. I remember one man said to me, "I'm so sick of trying to figure out the Bible." He's a Bible teacher. He said, "I'm so sick about trying to understand the Bible." I was talking to him at Hume Lake one time. He said, "I have decided to take everything for everybody." He said, "I've tried the dispensational route, and I've tried the modified dispensational route, and I've tried the covenant theology route, and I've just decided to take everything for everybody." I said to him, "When did you cut the frontlets of your sideburns off?" I said, "The Old Testament says to Jews to leave those. Is that for you?" I said, "When did you offer your last lamb?" I say, "You don't have wool and cotton mixed, I hope. Do you go through ceremonial washings of all the pots in your kitchen before your wife prepares your kosher meal? You can't take everything for everybody. When's the last time you tried to walk on Hume Lake?" You see, it isn't that simple. There must be interpretation.

Now, in accurately handling the Word and interpreting the Word, there are three errors to be avoided, three errors to be avoided. I could have a lot of fun with these. I'll try to restrain myself. Number one, number one, don't make a point at the price of a proper interpretation. Don't make a point at the price of a proper interpretation. In other words, don't make the Bible say what you want it to say.

Like the preacher who preached on the fact that women shouldn't have hair on top of their head, and his text was Top Knot Come Down from Matthew 24 where it says, "Let those on the housetop not come down." That is not what the passage is teaching. But then - and that's a bizarre illustration, of course, comical. But you can approach the Bible like the guy who said, "I've already got a sermon. I just have to find a verse for it." I mean you've already got your preconceived thing, you just want to get some verses to support it.

You know, invariably - and this is a confession, too - invariably if I go to trying to make a sermon, I wind up forcing the Bible to fit my sermon, but if I go to try to comprehend a passage, out of the

understanding of that passage flows a message to share with you. So, a long time ago I gave up trying to make sermons and now I try to understand the Word of God, and out of that understanding comes a message.

You know, you can think of some really great stuff, and some fabulous little outlines, and some cute little deals to do, but you just have to kind of twist the Bible to kind of fit it in a little bit, to make the Bible say what you want it to say.

The rabbis at one time, I remember reading in the Talmud, the rabbis at one time decided that they wanted to preach on the message of the fact that their people should care for each other, that there was a social problem, people weren't loving people. And so they said the great story in the Bible that says people should love people is the tower of Babel. And in the Talmud it interprets it this way. It says that the reason God scattered all those people, and the reason He confounded all their language was because they had put materials before people.

That doesn't make any sense, but this is what they said. "As the tower of Babel was growing taller, it took a hod carrier many hours to carry the load of bricks to the top so that the bricklayers could lay their bricks. If a man fell off the tower on the way down, nobody paid any attention, right? They didn't lose any bricks. But if a guy fell over on the way up, they were furious because they lost their bricks. And that's why God scattered the nations and confounded their language, because they were more concerned about bricks than people."

Now you know something? You ought to be more concerned about people than bricks. But that is not what the tower of Babel is saying, and God did not scatter them because they were more concerned about bricks, but because they were building an idolatrous religious system. You cannot make the Bible illustrate your sermon, or your thoughts. So the thing you want to be careful of is that you do not interpret the Bible at the price of its true meaning. Let it say what it means to say.

I've heard several sermons on 2 Peter 2:20 on how you can lose your salvation. Invariably, you'll hear the fellow say, "If after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in it, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning." And they'll say, "You see right there in that verse? You can escape the pollutions. You can have the knowledge of the Lord and Savior, and you can fall and become entangled, and your latter end is worse than before you believed. You see? You can lose your salvation."

The thing they forget about is the word "they." And if you study the word "they" at the beginning, you find it's the same "they" in the whole chapter, and it's talking about wells without water, clouds without rain, scabs and spots and blemishes on the love feast, and you trace it all the way back to 2:1 and it's talking about false prophets who follow the doctrines of demons. You cannot use the verse for that

because that is not its context.

In fact, Paul as a word for this when you do this. In 2 Corinthians 2:17 he says, "We are not like many, who corrupt the word of God." And he uses the word here *kaplos*, and *kaplos* basically had to do with selling something. It was basically a word in the marketplace. And it has to do with selling something deceitfully, a product that really isn't what you claim it is, falsifying. And he says there are some who falsify the Word of God, they corrupt it to fit their own thoughts.

Boy, I'm amazed when I hear people like Reverend Ike and these others take the Bible verses and twist them to their own meaning. I heard a guy the other night on television. He was preaching and preaching, and he was saying, "Now, what does the Bible mean?" And then held give the most bizarre, unbelievable interpretation, and the people would clap. They thought it was wonderful. It was so imaginative. It just wasn't true. Get the right message.

Second thing to avoid. Avoid superficial interpretation, superficial interpretation. As you study the Bible to learn what it says don't be superficial. People will always say, "Well, let's see I think this verse means this. Well, what does this verse mean to you?" And, you know, a lot of times you have a Bible study which is nothing but a pooling of ignorance, a whole lot of people sitting around telling what the don't know about the verse. Now I'm for Bible study but somebody's got to study to find out what it really means, and then you can discuss the application. But don't be superficial. First Timothy 5:17 talks about elders who work hard at the Word of God. It's really important not to be superficial.

Thirdly, another error to avoid. The first error that we mentioned is don't make a point at the price of the right interpretation. Secondly, avoid superficial interpretation. Thirdly, don't spiritualize. Don't spiritualize. The first sermon I ever preached was a horrible sermon. My text was, "And the angel rolled the stone away." My sermon was Rolling Away Stones in Your Life. I talked about the stone of doubt, and the stone of fear, and the stone of anger. That is not what that verse is talking about. It is talking about a real stone.

I made it a terrific allegory. I heard a sermon on "they cast out four anchors and wished for the day," the anchor of hope, the anchor of faith. Those are not anchors of anything but metal. I've heard the most incredible things. I remember when we were doing the series on the charismatic movement I told you about a series on the Book of Nehemiah, where Nehemiah represented the Holy Spirit, and the fallen walls were the fallen walls of human personality, and the king's pool was the baptism of the Holy Spirit, and the mortar between the bricks was tongues. And what Nehemiah's teaching is that the Holy Spirit wants to come in your life, and through tongues and the baptism of the Spirit, rebuild the broken walls of your human personality. Now you've got to have a lot of imagination to come up with that. Nehemiah would turn over in his grave.

I remember a fella coming in for counseling here and one of our pastors talking to him and they were having marital problems, and I think it was Jerry Mitchell and Jerry said that he asked them how they ever got married, they were so far apart. And he said, "It was a sermon our pastor preached." "A sermon on what?" "On the walls of Jericho." "What does the walls of Jericho have to do with marriage?" He said, "There was a spiritual principle. You march around something, claim it for God, march around seven times and the walls will fall down. He said find a girl you want, march around her seven times, and the walls of her heart will fall down. Marry her."

He said, "No, no. That isn't true. Nobody preached that." "Oh yes." He said, "I can't believe it." He gave him his phone number, and he called the preacher. And he said, "Yeah. I preached that, and I've gotten a lot of other good sermons out of that same text."

See, I call that "Little Bo Peep" preaching, because you don't need the Bible. You can use anything. You can lose Little Bo Peep. You can just get up and say, "Little Bo Peep lost her sheep. All over the world people are lost." See? You don't need the Bible. "And doesn't know where to find them. But they'll come home, ah, they'll come home." And then you tell them a tear-jerking story about somebody who came home, see? "Wagging their tails behind -"

Well, you get the message, right? It's so easy to do that. And you know a lot of people do that with the Old Testament, they turn the Old Testament into a fairy book, making all kinds of crazy things happen. Don't spiritualize. Get the right meaning. I can't tell you how many sermons I've heard on this verse, Matthew 19, I mentioned it not long ago. "It's easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than a rich man to enter into heaven." I've heard so many sermons on that and they say, "Now, how can a camel get through the eye of a needle? Well we know that if you could arrange all the molecules of a camel in a straight line -" That's when I fell over, you know?

Or the other one is, well you see the word for camel in the Greek and the word for thread in the Greek have one letter difference, and some scribe inverted it, and it should have been "a thread through the eye of a needle." Or else you've heard this one. There was a gate in the city of Jerusalem called the Needle Gate. And it was a little tiny gate for the camels to go through. Now you tell me, why would anybody build a little tiny gate for the camels to go through? In the second place, there has never been an archaeologist on the face of the earth who found that gate.

What Jesus is saying is this, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than a rich man to enter into heaven, or the kingdom of God. Do you know why He said that? He said, "Because the Jews believe that the more money you had, the more money you put in the coffers, the more money you had the more sacrifices you bought, the more sacrifices you bought and the more money you put in the coffers, the closer to the kingdom of God you got, so that the richer you were the better your chance of being in the kingdom." And what Jesus is saying, "The richest man in the world can't get into My kingdom any more than you can get a camel through the eye of a needle."

And the disciples responded by saying, "Who, then can be saved?" They got the message. "You mean you can't be saved, even a rich man can't be saved?" And then Jesus said, "With men this is impossible." And what He was trying to say was, "It's impossible for a rich man to buy his way into the kingdom. It's just as impossible as trying to stuff a camel through the eye of a needle." That's exactly what He mean to say.

But then He turned right around and said, "But with God - " what? " - all things are possible." He was trying to show them that according to their human capability they couldn't do what God could do in His power.

So just three things to avoid: Don't misinterpret it for your own ends, making a point at the price of a proper interpretation, avoid a superficial one, and don't spiritualize and allegorize.

Now, in order to properly interpret the Bible - and we're going to run by this real quick - in order to properly interpret the Bible, what do you have to do? Well, you have to bridge some gaps, okay? This is not a new book, right? This book's been around for a few years, parts of it for as many as 4,000 years. So it's been around a while.

Now how do we understand what they were saying and what was going on in the scene? We have to bridge four gaps. First is the language gap. We speak English. The Bible was written in Hebrew and Greek, a few parts in Aramaic, which is very similar to Hebrew. But we have a language gap that we have to cross, and so you hear me very often use a Greek word and explain that word or you wouldn't understand it.

For example in 1 Corinthians 4:1 Paul the apostle says, "Let a man so account of us, as ministers of Christ." And we say, "Oh boy, Paul. You are a minister of Christ." And that English word "minister," we think of "prime minister," the "minister of defense," you know? The minister is an elevated thing, a dignified term. But the Greek word is *huprets*. It means a third level galley slave on a ship, the bottom guy, chained to a piece of wood doing nothing but this. He says, "When the record goes in for me, let it be said that I was nothing more than a third level galley slave for Jesus Christ."

You see, you never get that out of the English terms. Why? You've got to bridge the language gap. You've got to cover a lot of ground. And that's a very, very needful thing.

For example, you'll study in Book of Hebrews the word "perfection" and you can get completely confused in comprehending the Book of Hebrews unless you understand that perfection has to do with salvation, not spiritual maturity. But that's what you have to find out as you study the words, the terms, and their relationships in the text. Very important to do this.

And by the way, if you want to study the words in the Bible, the New Testament particularly, get one of Vine's dictionaries. It's a very helpful thing for someone who doesn't know Greek. You can look up every English word and it'll tell you the Greek meanings, and so forth. It'll really help you as a Bible student. Also a good concordance will help you that way. Strong's and Young's Concordance - particularly Strong's - is helpful.

Secondly, you have to bridge a culture gap, all right? Cultures are different, I mean very, very different. If we don't understand the culture of the time in which the Bible was written, we'll never understand its meaning. For example, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." What does that mean? Why didn't he just say, "Before Jesus was born, He was already in the beginning." Why did - that would have solved a lot of problems for us.

But, you see, he used "the Word" because that was what was the vernacular at that time. And he was saying to the Greeks, "That thing which caused everything, that cosmic power, is none other than that Word which became flesh." And to the Jew the term "Word" was always the manifestation of God, for the Word of the Lord, the Word of the Lord, the Word of the Lord was always God emanating His personality. And so when he said, "The Word became flesh," or "The Word dwelt among us, or "The Word was in the world," or "The Word created," he is identifying Jesus Christ, the incarnate Christ as God. So in the text there, you see he meets the Greek mind, and the Hebrew mind with the right word that grabs both right at the vital point, and that's why he uses those terms.

And so I say this goes on all through the Bible. We have to bridge a culture gap, and a language gap. So very, very important. If you don't understand the Gnosticism existent in the time of the writing of Colossians, you'll not understand the Book. If you don't understand the culture that was going on with the Judaizers moving in to the Gentile churches, you can't understand the Book of Galatians. If you don't understand the Jewish culture, you can't understand the Book of Matthew. There must be a cultural comprehension. And it's good if you read books that help you with that. Edersheim and some of Barclay, though his theology is askew, some of his insights into culture are very good.

Thirdly, you have to bridge a geography gap. You read about "and they went down to Jericho." What do you mean "down to Jericho"? Well, if you ever go there, you know what it means to go down. They went up to Jerusalem. Jerusalem is definitely up. It's up from every place, up on a high plateau.

In 1 Thessalonians it says that "from you sounded out the word of the Lord throughout all Macedonia and Achaia." What's amazing is it sounded out so fast. Since the time Paul had been there and gone away and written the letter very little time has passed. And you say, "How in the world could the Thessalonians have only had had Paul in their midst for two weeks and their testimony is reached all their known world? How could that happen?"

And then you study a little geography, you find out running right through the middle of the, the city of Thessalonica was a thing known as the Egnatian Highway, which was the main concourse from east to west. Everybody going both directions came through Thessalonica. Whatever happened there got passed all the way down the line. And so a little bit of understanding of geography enriches the comprehension.

You understand the Lord Jesus Christ crossing the Kidron Valley to go up to the Mount of Olives to pray, and you understand that during the time of the Passover they were slaughtering literally thousands of lambs. They estimate as any as a quarter of a million within that one week could have been slaughtered. They were slaughtering those lambs. The blood ran down the back of the temple, down the backside of Mount Zion, and right into the Kidron Brook so that it was red with blood. And as Jesus walked out of the city, crossed that little brook, He would have stepped over the blood of all those sacrificial lambs, a tremendous reminder of His own blood about to be shed, which would take away the sins of the world. You see, a little bit of understanding of the geography, the brook and what it was doing makes it rich.

And I think about the fact that when Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead the word hit Jerusalem so fast. Do you know why? Because Bethany is butted up against the east side of Jerusalem so close. What happened in Bethany is only about a mile and a half to two miles from the temple ground, and the word would have gone like wildfire over that fast, and so people began to look at this one who had raised a man from the dead. We have to close some of those gaps.

Language, culture, geography, and one more is history. If you know a little history, it really helps. I'll never forget when I was teaching the gospel of John, how the whole key to understanding the interplay between Pilate and Jesus was based on knowledge of history. If you understand the Roman situation, if you understand what stupid things Pilate did when he came into the land, how that he came in waving big banners with the image of Caesar on them, and of course, since they worshiped Caesar and emperor worship was a religion, that constituted an idol, and it literally infuriated the Jews, infuriated their priests.

So, Pilate was off to a bad start from the very beginning. Pilate then tried to pull something on the Jews, and they caught him in it, reported him to Rome, and he almost lost his job. So, he had blown a big deal with the Jewish people, at least twice.

Later on, there was a third faux pas that he made. Now, when it came down to Christ, and Pilate was afraid of the Jews, and that's why he let Christ be crucified. Why was he afraid? Because he already had a rotten track record that had been sent back to Rome, and he knew his job was on the line.

Now that's the kind of history that we have to understand to open the meaning of the Bible. Now you can get that from something like *Zondervan's Pictorial Dictionary*, or a Bible dictionary of your choice, and that will enrich you.

You've got to interpret the Bible, and that means closing these gaps. You always hear people say, "Well, I just read no books. I go right to the Bible." That's not pious. That's just dumb because you've got to study the sources, and the background material to understand. I mean, I'd like to hear somebody give a clear exposition on Shur, Moab, Maher-shalal-hash-baz, Calno, Carchemish, and Michmash without a commentary or a Bible dictionary. You're going to have a tough time doing it. And so we want to use good sources.

Now, as you interpret using the sources, you have to close a language gap, a cultural gap, a geography gap, and a history gap. What are the principles you use? Listen carefully as I run these by.

First, the literal principle. You want to use a literal principle. I'll just give you five of them quickly. That means you understand Scripture in its literal, normal, natural sense. Now there will be figures of speech, but that's normal language, too. There will be symbols. That's normal language, too. When you get to apocalyptic passages like Zechariah, and Daniel, and Ezekiel, and Isaiah, and Revelation, and you see beasts and images, you know those are figures, and you know those are symbols but they convey - watch this - literal truth. You take the Bible in its normal, natural sense. Take the literal, normal, natural sense.

You know, you always have to be worried when somebody comes and says, "There's a secret meaning here." And they use the verse, "The letter kills, but the Spirit gives life." And so they want this allegorical method. Don't just take what it says, go behind to the hidden, secretive meaning. You know who knows what that is? Nobody knows. They're making it up. Take it in its literal sense.

Secondly, we must follow historical principle. The Bible must be studied in its historical context. Now we've already mentioned this. What did it mean to the people to whom it was spoken or written? A text without a context historically is a pretext. If you read Philippians 1 and you read about Paul's great statements there, you have to know when he's talking about some preaching Christ of contention, and so forth, nevertheless I rejoice that He is preached, you have to understand the historical setting or you never really understand what's in his heart. The historical principle.

Thirdly, the grammatical principle, grammatical. What we mean there is look at the sentence, prepositions, pronouns, verbs, and nouns. We used to learn how to diagram a sentence so we could find out what it's saying. For example, in Matthew 28, great commission, "Go into all the world and preach the gGospel to every creature, baptizing them and teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I've commanded unto you." At first you read, "Go - " that sounds like a verb " - into all the world, preach the gospel, make disciples, baptize, teach - " all sound like verbs.

But as you get into the sentence you find there's only one verb, and the one verb is *mathteusete* "make disciples." Going is nothing more than a participle. Baptizing is a participle. Teaching is a participle, which means they modify the main verb. What the great commission says is make disciples, and in making disciples you'll have to go, baptize, and teach. And if you understand that, then the fullness of that concept comes out of that text. So, that's studying the grammar, just for an illustration.

Let me give you another illustration in Matthew 18. I think this is a good one. How many times have you heard somebody say this in a prayer meeting? "Where two or three are gathered together, there am I in the midst of them." Friends, two or three of us are here. The Lord is here. Listen, do you want to know something? If I'm there alone, the Lord is there. That's right. That verse has nothing to do with a prayer meeting, and if you study the context you find that out. If you study the grammar around it, you find that out. What it's saying is that when you go to do your disciplining, to put somebody out of the church, there am I in the midst when you've confirmed their sin in the mouth of two or three witnesses. And you'll learn that if you study the text. And so, you have to examine the grammar, but very carefully, so that you really comprehend it.

In fact, I've heard Hebrews 12 - I remember when I was a kid. Boy, I heard the most intimidating sermon in my life on Hebrews 12. I never forgot it. "Behold, we are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses." And this guy said, "Everyone's watching you." What do you mean "everyone"? Everyone in chapter 11 of Hebrews. Enoch, Abraham, Moses, and he goes down through all these great heroes of the faith. They're all watching you to see how you're doing in the Christian life. That's very disturbing. My first reaction was they haven't got anything better to do. What's going to happen when we all get up there, who will be watching what?

That isn't what it means. In chapter 11 of Hebrews, you have a whole list of people who live by faith, and in chapter 12 what he's saying is that great cloud of witnesses are witnesses testifying that the blessed life is the life of faith, and you ought to learn from their testimony. Has nothing to do with them sitting in the grandstands watching you. That comes from understanding the grammar, the text.

Fourth, the synthesis principle. We have a literal principle, historical principle, grammatical principle, and a synthesis principle. And this is what the reformist call the *analogia scriptura*. The Scripture all comes together. In other words - now watch this - one part of the Bible doesn't teach something that the other part contradicts. So that as you study the Scripture it must all fit together.

You can't, for example, you're reading through 1 Corinthians, you come to where it talks about the baptism for the dead. "Oh," you say "Well, there's a new doctrine. If you get baptized, you can get baptized for some dead person, and that will save them. There it is, the baptism for the dead." Now wait a minute. Does the Bible allow for the fact that somebody could get baptized for dead person? Is

that anywhere in the Scripture at all? Does that contradict the doctrine of salvation as we know it? Then that can't be the interpretation of that passage because no passage in and of itself will contradict the teaching of Scripture. And that's the synthesis principle.

J.I. Packer says wonderfully, "The Bible appears like a symphony orchestra with the Holy Spirit as its Toscanini. Each instrument has been brought willingly, spontaneously, creatively, to play his notes just as the great conductor desired, though none of them could ever hear the music as a whole, the point of each part only becomes fully clear when seen in relation to all the rest."

You know what that tells me? The synthesis principle? There are really no contradictions. What appear as contradictions can be resolved if we have the information because the Bible comes together as a whole.

Fifth, the practical principle, the practical principle. You say, "John, I mean, this is all so foggy, up in the air, the literal principle, and all of these other things. When does it ever get down to where I'm living?" This is the practical principle. The final question is so what? As I try to interpret the Bible, how do I find out what it means for me? And this is great. Make sure in your Bible study that you find the practical principle.

I have a little phrase that I use when I teach this class and it's this: Learn to principilize the Scripture. Read it and find out what is the spiritual principle there that applies to me? But you can't do that until you've gone through the other principles first: The literal, historical, grammatical, and synthesis. And you know what it mean by what it says, and now you come to how it applies to you.

Now, that's how you interpret the Bible. And while you're reading through the Bible and you're reading through the Old Testament, now and then work on some of those problem passages or maybe take a book and just slowly work through it. You might not have too much time to do it. By the time you're doing this reading you may only have 15 minutes left a day, but just that little bit.

Read a little in a dictionary, or a commentary, and begin to put some things together and work through what is the literal meaning? What is the historical setting? What is the grammatical structure? How does it fit in with the rest of Scripture? And how does it apply to me?

So, read the Bible and interpret the Bible. And very quickly I'm just going to add a few at the end and let you go.

Thirdly, meditate on the Bible. Meditate on the Bible. Don't be in a hurry. And I don't even need to say much about this, except to remind you the Scripture says, "The words which I command thee this day shall be in thine heart," Deuteronomy 6. "Thou shalt teach them diligently to thy children. Shall talk of them when thou sittest in thine house and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down

and when thou risest up.” In other words, “Boy, you ought to have these things running around your mind all the time.”

Now you want to know something? I’m going to tell you a secret. If you’re reading through the Old Testament and you’re reading a book of the New Testament 30 times in a row all the time, you’re going to have this stuff running around in your mind. And meditation is what takes all of those parts and begins to mold them together into a cohesive comprehension of biblical truth. God even said in Deuteronomy 6, “Bind them for a sign on thy hand and put them between thine eyes and write them on the posts of thy house and on thy gates.”

God says, “I want My Word everywhere. I want it in your mouth, when you stand up, lie down, walk, and sit. I want it in front of your house, on your gates. I want it on your arms, hanging between your eyes. I want it everywhere.” And you know, we live in a culture where you drive up and down the street and what do you see? I mean, your eyes are literally assaulted with garbage, aren’t they? Whiskey ads, and beer ads, and girlie shows, and rotten movies, and garbage stuff just pouring into your head. And God says, “Take My Word and let it be a billboard in front of your eyes. Let it be all over your arms, filling your mind, your voice, wherever you go.” That’s the way it ought to be.

A man was asked one time, “When you can’t sleep, do you count sheep?” He said, “No, I talk to the Shepherd.” That’s what God wants His people to do is talk to the Shepherd, meditate. Psalm 1:1-2. “Blessed *is* the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But his delight *is* in the law of the Lord and in his law doeth he - ” what? “ - meditate day and night.”

Like the cow chews the cud, the proverbial illustration just going over it, and over it, and over it. Cows have several stomachs, and they just keep passing it from one to the other while it goes through the process of digestion.

So, we are to read the Bible, study the Bible, meditate on the Bible. Fourth, finally, teach the Bible. You want to know what I discovered? The best way to learn it is to give it away. Did you know that? The things that I learned well enough to teach you are the things I retain. Let me tell you something, people, you are my spiritual source of strength. That is true. If I didn’t have you to force me to show up here with a sermon every week, I question whether I’d pull it off. I know you’re going to be here, saying, “MacArthur, here we are, tell us.” And it’s that constant realization that I must teach you that forces me to learn.

And I’ll tell you another thing. Do you want to know, it’s very easy to be difficult to understand? Do you know that? If you go to hear somebody speak and you don’t understand anything they said, they probably don’t understand their subject. If a guy is not clear, he doesn’t understand his subject. It’s very easy to be difficult to understand. It’s very hard to be clear, because in order to be clear you

have to master your subject. And so as a teacher, you see, you are forced to mastering your subject or you'll never be clear.

A lot of times people say, "Well, you know, I don't understand. Nothing's happening in my church. I teach the Bible. People are going out saying, 'He teaches the Bible, but I don't know what he's talking about.'" It's got to be clear. And if you teach, you'll retain it. Just feed somebody else and see how it feeds your own heart.

I believe that personal motivation for study comes from responsibility. If I didn't have somebody to teach I wouldn't produce. I got home, just for an illustration, Friday. I had two days to prepare this - well, really 20 years of thoughts, but two days to put it together. You know what happened? I did it. If I hadn't had to teach this till next Sunday I wouldn't have done it. I would have just read something and kind of gone along at a slow pace. But I thank God for the pressure you apply in my life to doing this.

I can't come on Sunday and say, "Hey, you know I got the greatest sermon. I think I'm going to have it together by Tuesday." You won't be here Tuesday. And that kind of pressure forces me to stay in it so that I can understand it.

Well, I hope that just helps to get you started. Read the Bible, interpret the Bible, meditate on the Bible, and teach it. And when you're all done, you know somebody is liable to get a big head and say, "Well, I've arrived. I've mastered it all." Just remember Deuteronomy 29:29. "The secret things belong to the Lord." When you've said it all, and done it all, and learned it all, you haven't scratched the surface of the infinite mind of God.

But you know what the purpose is? Let me tell you this, and I've got to say this. Your purpose in learning the Word of God is not to have knowledge, because as Paul said, "Knowledge does - " what? " - puffs up." Your purpose is to know God, and to know God is to learn humility. See? To know God is to learn true humility.

Well, let's pray.

Father, I'm thankful for the patience for the people tonight as we went long, and yet it seems like we had such a great time sharing together in the need for studying the Word. Lord, it may be a little overwhelming for some of these dear folks, and it is even for me sometimes to do all that I should do to know Your Word. Lord, help us to start somewhere, at least with reading. And little by little, beginning to interpret things.

As these folks make little notes in their margin and then come back to want to understand them, show them the right sources, books, or maybe to listen to some other teacher who can help them. Help us, Father, then, to meditate on the Word. And then to teach it so that we go through the cycle: First

receiving it from You and then finally passing it on to someone else.

Oh, what a blessed time we've had tonight. Make us people of the Word. I know You read my heart and the deep gratitude I have for the faithfulness of this people who have come tonight to open their hearts to this needful thing of studying Your Word. Thank You, Father, for their openness. I pray that You'll reward them for such desire and faithfulness by fulfilling in their lives Your good Word. Not only as they clear it in their minds, but as they live it in their hearts. In Christ's name. Amen.

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