

# MISTAKES WE MAKE WHEN READING THE BIBLE

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## 1. WE FAIL TO SEE THE BIGGER PICTURE OF SCRIPTURE

Although the Bible was written over a 1600-year period by various writers it forms a unit with a central theme. This means that when we read a specific section of the Bible without paying due attention to the whole, we're likely to miss the "continuous and stunning landscape" of Scripture. Without the bigger picture, we can gain only a partial appreciation of what any individual snapshot is trying to tell us. From Genesis to Revelation the Bible is telling us about the reign and rule of God. Understanding the metanarrative of Scripture—the grand, overarching story—helps us piece together what may otherwise seem like disparate stories, teachings, and themes. Knowing the main story of redemption helps us understand all of the individual stories scattered throughout Scripture. Our disconnect from the metanarrative of the Bible can render us much like a gardener who fails to recognize colored leaves as a sign of autumn rather than a sign of disease. When we are fuzzy about the Big Story, we may have difficulty finding continuity between the God of the Old Testament and the God of the New Testament.

Scripture adds to Scripture. All of it connects and was progressively revealed. God didn't tell us about himself all at once, but slowly through the ages revealed Himself and His plan more and more. So even though what we know of God in Genesis is true, adding Exodus broadens our knowledge even more. Make sense? The Gospels give us a picture of Jesus, but the Epistles add to and deepen our understanding more still. God's Word is a network of information that all ties together. Some books come at ideas from different aspects and angles than others, and we need all Scripture to balance us out and keep us from going to extremes.

Be careful to not take an idea from one verse and run with it. Every verse in Scripture is true, but we as humans tend to take things and twist them. We hear something we like, and we take it so far that it means something different to us than what God was actually trying to communicate. Be sure to compare all the ideas you are drawing out of God's Word with the rest of His Word. If you come up with an idea that is not found anywhere else or seems to contradict the rest of Scripture, you are probably interpreting the passage you are studying incorrectly.

## 2. LOOKING FOR SCRIPTURE TO FIT YOUR THEOLOGY

This pitfall is hard to detect at times and is a temptation for all of us. We all have certain views about morality and theology, whether we know a lot or little about the Bible. You may have been raised in a Christian home, being taught Christian principles all your life, or you may have never had any Christian influence at all. Either way, you do have assumptions and beliefs about God, whether you are conscious of it or not. Certain scriptures will come up that challenge your theology.

When we read God's Word, we don't read it objectively. We come and look at it through the lens of our worldview, our assumptions, presuppositions, views, and values. We don't

actively choose to do this, it's simply how we function as human beings. Because of this reality, it's extremely easy to breeze through Scripture and pick out verses or passages that seem to align with what we already believe or think. It's also very likely that you will fall into this pitfall if you staunchly adhere to doctrinal systems that have been organized by scholars of the Word. When you come to certain passages in Scripture, it may be very easy for you to read certain theological arguments into the text, because you already believe them to be right. Instead of depending on the writings and ideas of other people, be sure to search the Word out for yourself. The systems of theology that you believe may be true, or they may not. Let God's Word determine what you think. Remember that God has gifted certain people to be incredible teachers, and we can learn a lot from these believers. But we cannot trust that they will be infallible in all of their conclusions. We should not come to the Word thinking, "What passages can I find to support what I believe?", but instead, "Does God's Word actually communicate what I have been believing?"

Hebrews 4:12 says, "For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart." We can trust God's Word to transform our minds. As we are learning to read the Bible it will reveal our wrong thinking and renew our minds if we allow it to.

### **3. WE ALLOW OUR HEARTS TO GUIDE OUR STUDY**

We often turn to Scripture for help or hope when we are feeling discouraged or seeking peace. Because of this, we can tend to approach the Bible primarily as a way to feel better. The gospel is good news, but not every page of the Bible is intended to make us feel good about ourselves. Quite to the contrary, Scripture often points out our depravity and unfaithfulness. However, it also reminds of our faithful God. When we pick and choose verses from Scripture aimed merely at lifting our spirits when we're feeling down, we run the risk of reducing the Bible to a self-help manual. Huge sections of our Bibles often remain unread because they fail to deliver an immediate dose of emotional satisfaction. A well-rounded approach to Bible study challenges us to navigate all areas of the Bible, even those that make us uncomfortable or that are difficult to understand. The sum of Your Word is truth.

### **4. ASSUMING EVERYTHING YOU READ WAS WRITTEN TO YOU**

Everything in the Bible was written for you, but not everything in the Bible was written to you. You were not the immediate audience for Scripture. Different parts of the Bible were written to different people: The Israelites, different kings, specific followers of God, certain groups of believers, Gentile nations, churches, and more. These original audiences were the first recipients of what God was writing. The Bible was written to them.

However, everything in the Bible is for us. It is for us to learn from and for us to know God through. It's for us to come to understand mankind and ourselves and for us to examples of how to live and how not to. Even though we weren't there when Moses was giving the Law to Israel in the wilderness, there is a ton we can learn from those passages. Although we weren't members of the churches of Ephesus, Philippi, or Corinth, we can still glean a

huge amount of wisdom from the epistles. God didn't originally write the Gospels to us, but He did mean for us to be changed and taught by them.

The danger in assuming everything you read was written to you is that when we do that, we often take passages out of context or twist them to fit our situation. This truth may initially make the Bible seem less personal or accessible to you, but the opposite is true. God wants you to glean as much as you can from what He has communicated, and He has preserved His Word through the centuries so that you and others can know Him. By keeping the right perspective and realizing your place in history, you will be able to understand even more of this truth that He has so graciously invited you to partake in.

## **5. IGNORING PASSAGES YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND**

We all do it.

"Uh-oh, there's that really confusing sentence that Paul wrote. Guess I'll just skip over that."

"I've read this verse a hundred times, and I've never known what it meant."

"That book is impossible to figure out. Even I have to admit it seems contradictory."

It's so easy to just move past passages of Scripture that we don't understand or that seem controversial, instead of stopping to study them. Some parts of the Bible are just flat out confusing to us! But let's remember that God put every word into the Bible for a reason, even those sections that are initially really hard to understand.

If you are confused about what a section of God's Word is saying, don't get frustrated, bored, or uneasy. He gave us His Word, and He wants to help us grow to understand it more and more. Be willing to put the work into studying hard passages. It's easy to read through really clear passages, but don't miss out on hidden treasures! Sometimes the most confusing passages end up communicating the most encouraging and comforting messages.

## **6. READING TOO FAST**

The Bible is a supernatural book and not a novel. It requires your deliberate attention. Search for meaning in it as you would for gold. In order to discover amazing truths you need to search and study diligently. Your goal is not just to read the Bible like any other book, but to search for truth. Take your time when reading the Bible, Read and re-read. Ponder about what you have read and meditate on it.

Meditation is the process of going over a text or section and thinking about it repeatedly. What did it mean in its original context? How does it apply today? What does it teach about God or man? How might I worship God because of what I've read?

## **7. WE CONFUSE READING BOOKS ABOUT THE BIBLE WITH STUDYING THE ACTUAL BIBLE**

Extrabiblical resources can be of great help when seeking to understand the Bible and the Christian life, but they are never meant to replace God's Word itself. If we prefer reading what others have written about the Bible to reading the Bible itself, we are probably reading what someone says about what someone says about what the Bible

says. As with topical studies, books about the Bible can be helpful, but they are not foundational. The more time we spend in the primary source (the Bible), the more we'll know and understand it.

## **8. READING IN A DISTRACTING ENVIRONMENT**

This one seems like a no-brainer, but you'd be surprised by how many people I talk to who read their Bibles with the TV on, while playing iPhone games, or while friends or family are nearby asking for help. While those scenarios may work for homework or paying the bills, they make it close to impossible to really read the Scriptures and hear what God is trying to tell you.

Reading your Bible can (and should!) be a very personal affair. Eliminating distractions could mean the difference between reading a cool verse and finding the passage that changes how you view your life.

## **9. READING THE BIBLE WITHOUT AN EXPECTATION**

Another mistake we make to reading the Bible without a sense of expectation and faith that the Lord will speak to you through it. Mix faith with the Word and success will come. Some people read their Bibles in order to feel they have done something good for the day. The Bible is given by God to help us change and in order for that to happen we must have faith, embracing truth and acting upon it.

## **10. ONLY READING THE BIBLE WHEN IT IS CONVENIENT**

How often do you read the Bible? If it isn't daily, then you're missing out. You might be busy with work, your family, or your kids, however, no matter how busy you get, you always find time to eat, right? Likewise, God's Word is daily bread that you need for your spiritual nourishment. If you skip feasting on God's Word regularly, you're going to suffer some serious consequences. You need to read your Bible every day because God's Word is food for your soul. King David made a vow of worship 7 times a day to the Lord (Ps 119:164). Daniel went aside 3 times a day to pray. The people of the Bible made spending time with God a priority. Are you doing the same? An easy way to get Biblical truth into your being is to listen to an audio Bible. Download it on your phone or mobile device and take time during the day to listen. Look for moments throughout the day to read and listen to God's Word. Make it a priority in your life!

## **QUESTIONS FOR OUR LIFE GROUPS TO DISCUSS**

- a. What are the things that are hindering you from spending time with God and what changes can you make in order to spend more regular time with God?
- b. What are the dangers of reading too many books about the Bible rather than reading the Bible itself?
- c. Discuss some of the passages in the Bible that you really don't understand. See if you can assist one another to better understand those passages.