

Topic 2A: The Bible is important; it's reliable; get into it; study it; its message is the Gospel

Area 2: The Bible is the foundation of all truth in life.

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My objective is to use context to study the Bible to understand what it meant to the writer, and then apply it to what it means to our lives today.

Repetition point: Thy word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path

What an opportunity to be with you for topic 2A, "The absurdity of God's word and how to study it," in the area called, "The Bible is the foundation of all truth in life." This is the fifth topic of all the 21 topics. I am so excited to talk about this topic because it has not only meant so much in my life. I know if you really purpose to seek out the Lord in his word, that he will be found. If you choose to make regular Bible study part of your life, then the riches of the knowledge of God beyond your wildest dreams await you, but they are sometimes like buried treasure. I remember when I was 13 before I became a Christian. I would read the Bible and it really did not do much for me because I did not know how to study it and I did not have the Holy Spirit in me. But, I will never forget after I accepted Jesus as my personal savior, the words just jumped off the pages and penetrated my heart and mind. God was revealing his word to me. But, I still did not know how to study the Bible. So God can show you amazing things about his word without knowing how to study the Bible. But you would agree is better to know how to study and apply it. So let us get started with what I wish someone had explained to me when I was in my teen years. I want to cover why you can trust the Bible, how to study it and finally how to apply it. Along the way I am going to share stories from people's lives about how the Bible helped them.

Bible Saves Corporal Frank Richard's life

"This Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) bible and tin were responsible for saving the life of their owner, Corporal Frank Richards 3526, of the 6th Liverpool Rifles. Cpl Richards carried his Bible into battle somewhere in Northern France during the First World War. He was shot but the bible saved his life by deflecting the bullet away from his heart and he was lucky to escape with bruised ribs. The bullet hole can clearly be seen to pass straight through the bible."

The bible is now in the National Museums Liverpool, UK. This excerpt was taken from the page which carries a picture of the bible. <http://www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/online/exhibitions/faith/bible.asp>. There are many items that can stop a bullet, and the Bible is really concerned with saving souls, but it is cool that Frank Richard's was literally saved by the Bible.

Internal Validity

When it comes to trusting the Bible, we need to look at 2 points, the internal and external validity. After praying about what one verse should permeate this discussion, I came to Ps 119:105, "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path." Clearly in this verse, it is assumed you can trust the direction God's word is showing you. But why? The Bible consists of 66 books written by over 40 authors from different walks of life over 1500 years; It was written by kings, fishermen, peasants, poets and philosophers; It was written in the wilderness, dungeons and palaces; It was written in different emotional states from the heights of joy to depths of despair; It was written across 3 continents, Asia, Africa and Europe; It was written in 3 languages, Hebrew -the old testament-, Aramaic

Topic 2A: The Bible is important; it's reliable; get into it; study it; its message is the Gospel and Greek-the new testament; it covers hundreds of controversial subjects and topics. Since 1815, it is estimated that 5 billion bibles have been printed in 2403 languages covering 95% of people. It is consistently the world's best seller. And as Josh McDowell says, this book stands alone unique. (By the way I recommend books from Josh McDowell). Amazingly, it has HARMONY and CONTINUITY. I will say that again, amazingly it has HARMONY and CONTINUITY across all that diversity. Can you imagine if you took 40 people from 3 continents across 3 languages across the same 1500 years from different walks of life and asked them to write about some topic like say... dealing with money. You would have some people saying that we should give 10% to God. Some would say all the money is mine to keep. Some would say you should save and some would say you should spend. My point is that it is just amazing that there is so much internal agreement in the Bible. It means there is a God that has been directing and inspiring all the writers. That is proved out today in the fact that God's word still speaks to the 2.1 Billion Christian believers.

External Validity

You need to understand the Bible was originally written on Papyrus. Papyrus plant parts are pressed together and dried to make paper. Papyrus in Europe only lasts 200 years before it disintegrates, unless it is somehow preserved in a sealed cave. In fact, there is a story of an archaeologist who found an ancient scroll in a cave and when he brought it out into the light it disintegrated. So along with all other books written 1000s of years ago, the original manuscripts written by the authors are NOT available. So how do we know that what we are reading is what the authors originally wrote? The validity of any document of antiquity is externally judged by two things 1) What is the time between the writing of the original and the writing of the copy? and 2) How many of the copies of the original do we have because we can then prove out any discrepancies 1 ?

Other books written in antiquity average about 1000 years between the original writing and the earliest manuscript, but the Bible is only 50-75 years. The average number of copies of any major book of antiquity was 40 but the Bible has about 24,633 (The number two book is the Iliad by Homer 622 copies). If you were to take all the copies and compare them word for word, you would find no truly substantial difference that would affect an article of faith (Scholar Philip Schaff). So of all books of antiquity none has more reliable copies than the Bible, and they all agree. Even more, they are written many times by eye-witnesses of the events (1 John 1:3, 2 Pet 1:16). In fact, one of the greatest evidence lawyers of all time, Dr Simon Greenleaf 2, who both wrote three volumes on the laws of legal evidence and mocked Christianity, was challenged by his students to apply his laws of evidence to the resurrection of Jesus Christ. In the process he became a Christian and came to the conclusion that the resurrection of Jesus Christ is one of the best established facts of history. If you think about it, if Peter' was lying when he stood up and declared in Acts 2:2 the resurrection is true, then the crowd would have lynched him for lying. Finally, one of the greatest evidences for the truth of the resurrection is that 11 of the 12 apostles died a martyr's death. If they had not been with Jesus for 40 days (Acts 1:3), then why would they die a martyr's death for a lie?

Although the Bible was written over 1500 years by people from varied backgrounds, settings and languages, "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness." (2Ti 3:16). Because of both its internal and external evidence you can read it in confidence that what you are reading is what the original authors and God intended. We believe the Bible is without error--it is inerrant. I am so convinced of this that I have bet the farm on the Bible and made it the foundation of my life. Now we are going to look at how to study it. Why? Because, "His word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path"

Josh McDowell's story

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A good example of someone who truly examined the evidence of the Bible is Josh McDowell. As a young college student, Josh McDowell considered himself an agnostic and believed that Christianity was basically worthless. In fact he set out to disprove the Bible once and for all. But after being challenged by a group of Christians to intellectually examine the claims of the Bible, Josh discovered compelling and overwhelming evidence for the reliability of the Christian faith. As he experienced the power of God's love, Josh's life changed dramatically. This was taken from <http://www.Josh.org>

How to study the Bible

Here is a joke about Bible roulette. It is where many of us just open the Bible to some random page and start reading.

Joe was experiencing a very tough time in his life. He felt his faith slipping and was desperate. He pulled out his Bible and decided to randomly open it up to get a word from God. So he flipped pages and stopped at Matthew 27:5, which says, "Judas went out and hanged himself." He thought he'd try it again and Luke 10:37 came up, where Jesus said, "Go and do thou likewise." So he quickly flipped to another verse and landed on John 13:27, which says, "What you are about to do, do quickly."

I have found that if I am truly desperate and I do this, God will give me an inspirational verse. But you would agree that Bible roulette is not a way to study the Bible. The way to study the Bible is to get into it, roll around and wrestle with it and be intent on studying it with your head and with your heart. In the same way that the writers of the Bible were eyewitnesses of God's Holy Spirit inspiring their understanding, it is your turn to decide to be an eyewitness of power of God's word fueled by the inspiration of his spirit. For the word of God is, "living and active, sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart" (Heb 4:12). In order to dive into this amazing book I have to give you a framework, some people would call it a construct, for studying the Bible. It is made up of 3 rules. The three ideas may seem like big words at first. But, when you start explaining words like this, people are going to stand up and say this person knows a little something about the Bible.

1. Context - Context within the passage, within the book, within the Bible, context of you.
2. Hermeneutics- What the passage meant to the original writer
3. Exegesis - What passage means to us today

To give you a way to remember the last two, there was an old Miller Lite Beer commercial that was 8th greatest advertising campaign of all time. In the commercial 1/2 of these football players would yell, "Tastes Great." while the other 1/2 would yell "Less Filling." Something like this (sound). So I want you to remember studying a Bible passage by, "What it Meant" and then "What it Means." "Hermeneutics" and then "Exegesis".... So let's start with context.

Context

Context is really an aid to help you find out both what it meant, "Hermeneutics" (see I put a "meant" in there to remember it) and what it means, exegesis. Context is so important that it gets its own bullet point. I want you to envision 4 concentric circles-circles inside each other. If you need to stop the audio to write them out, then do so. The top of the paper would have, the phrase "It means in context." The inner-most circle has the word, "This Passage" in it. The second outer circle has the word, "This Book". The third outer circle would be, "The whole Bible." The last outer circle would be, "My context". Now let's see how to use each circle.

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- Circle one, This Passage -The very first thing you should look for when you read a verse is what your common sense tells you is the plain meaning. If it is not clear than get a dictionary out. Make sure you understand what each word means. There is an excellent, I mean excellent, bible study tool on the internet called <http://www.biblos.com> . Check it out for word understanding. For any verse you read, there is no option but to read what is before it and after it to start to understand the passage in context. In fact, one thing I enjoy is coloring verbs and nouns different colors in a passage, really getting down and rolling around and playing with the verse.
- Circle two, This Book - We must understand why this book was written and the type of book it is. Ask the 5 Ws (Who?, what?, where?, when?, why?) This book was written at some time in history to a particular people for a particular reason. That information will cause us to read this book differently. For example, if a boy wanted to convey kindness and emotion to a girlfriend through a letter, would he write her a set of laws about why she should like him or would he use a poem? The girl receiving the letter would read it very differently if it is a set of laws versus a poem. In a similar way we should read the book of Leviticus as a set of laws for the Jewish people differently than the psalms as poetry and a guide to worship. So you must remember that you read the book the way it was meant to be read A classic mistake many people make is to read the book of Proverbs as if it were a book of hard and fast rules. No, it is a set of PROBABILITIES. It is a set of guidelines that will most likely happen if you follow them.(Read the book, "How to Read The Bible for All it is worth" by Fee and Stuart for more info.)
- Circle three, the whole Bible - How many other verses in scripture are similar to the words in this passage? We need to use other supporting scriptures to interpret scripture. Think in the big picture of redemption, that is God creates man, man sins, Jesus comes to pay for our sins and man's chooses to accept him or not, where does this passage fall in the big picture?
- Circle four, My context - what kind of assumptions do you in your culture bring to the passage that may positively or negatively affect your perception of the passage. For example, if you are reading a passage about God as your heavenly father but your own dad had an anger problem. You do not want to impose that God has an anger problem. On the other hand, you may be in a very difficult place much like a Bible character and that experience will help you relate to the passage. We need to be conscience of what our experiences bring to the passage.

Knowing the context is the first part of the framework for understanding the Bible. You see, the word of God is a sharper than any two edged sword. Have you ever handled a sword? They can be deadly if they are not used right. But used correctly you can rightly divide a situation with the word of truth, to first find out what the passage meant and then what it means: again hermeneutics and exegesis.

Hermeneutics - what it meant

Remember that the key question you are asking is what this passage meant to the writer and its original reader? One thing that helps to figure out what it meant is to use a piece of software that shows you what the original word meant. There are three free desktop versions out there that I like. The first one is called Online Bible, the second is called E-Sword and the last is just called Sword. You can see a comparison at <http://www.tyndalehouse.com//BibleSoftware.htm>. My favorite online Bible tool is <http://www.biblos.com>. What is so cool is that you can see what the original words meant and analyze why the translators chose to translate the words the way they did. It is like seeing something at first in black and white and then seeing it in color, as you understand all the possible meanings of a word. You see every word in the Bible is given a number called a Strong's concordance number. That is how they trace it, like a detective. Use a commentary or get a good topical Bible. The NIV topical Bible is a good one.

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Exegesis - what it means

Remember that the key question you are asking is what this passage means to today's reader? One of the things you will run into over and over is this tension between the fact that the particular passage you are reading was written to a particular people at a particular time for a particular reason, but it is God's word and it has eternal relevance to all people. You will run into passages like whether women should cover their head in church all the time? Study passages like this but do not let them keep you from the main point of being in a relationship with God. Fee and Stuart in their book, "How to Read the Bible for all it is worth" have a great quote and two very helpful guidelines.

"Pg 21 Because the Bible is God's Word, it has eternal relevance; it speaks to all humankind, in every age and in every culture. Because it is God's Word, we must listen- and obey. But because God chose to speak his Word through human words in history, every book in the Bible also has historical particularity; each document is conditioned by the language, time and culture in which it was originally written. Interpretation of the Bible is demanded by the "tension" that exists between its eternal relevance and historical particularity. "

1. The passage can never mean what it never meant. This means the passage you are reading cannot mean something to you that it could never have meant to the original author or its readers.
2. If a person today is in a similar situation to the situation of the Bible passage, then you can usually apply what it meant to them to today's situation.

So let's look at a good example.

Good example -thy word

Remember the key verse of this topic? "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path." So let's apply our framework to this passage. First we get the context of the passage and read the whole chapter of Psalm 119. I see the whole chapter is about the greatness of God's word and following in his ways. I look at the verbs. It is interesting he has a word for lamp for his feet and another for light to his path. They are different. One is to show what is right before you and the other what is a couple steps ahead. When I studied the Hebrew word for light, it is the word "ore" which can mean the light of prosperity, life and instruction. Second, we consider the context of the book of Psalms. This book is about worship and poetry. So I should read it looking for more flowing and vibrant language but not for exact translation. God's word is not a literal flashlight. It is also pretty cool that King David, a man after God's own heart wrote this passage. Third, in terms of the context of the whole Bible how many other passages say that God's word shows the way? Tons. How many say it is a literal flashlight? none. Forth, what kind of context and bias do I bring to the passage? When I was a kid I fell off my bike and hit a tree while on a path. In addition, most of the paths I walk on are paved paths. I also like to take walks on paths in the woods. But most of King David's roads and paths were not paved. So I need to set aside my view of a paved path and just take my experience of walking on a path.

- Hermeneutic- this meant to David's readers that God's word will show them how to avoid the rocky places of life that are right in front of them today and that it will also show them how to direct their near future steps to stay on the right path with God.
- Exegesis - Since we are in a similar situation of needing direction from God, this means to us that God's word will help us in our every day choices to avoid pitfalls and then give us direction for our near future steps.

Application

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We need to be careful not to get caught in just understanding what it means and not applying it: we want to come to it to get closer to Jesus. God's word is truly understood by applying it in action. As an example let us take the Dead Sea versus the Sea of Galilee in Israel. I had the opportunity to be in both of these bodies of water. The Dead Sea just takes in water and never gives it out. It becomes stagnant and full of salt to the point where nothing lives in the sea. On the other hand the Sea of Galilee takes in water from the Jordan and then gives it back at the other end of the lake. In a similar way if we just understand God's word and do not apply it to our lives, our lives will become stagnant. However, if we take in the living water of God's word, let it fill us up like full sponges and then apply it, we will be full of life that is truly life. We consult God's word, pray and put it into action by asking, "What would The Lord do in this situation?" Then, we do it.

In another story from a sermon called, "Dust on the Bible," this man Tom recounts how the Bible saved his life because he read it and applied it. He returned from Saigon during the Vietnam war to North Carolina. He and 4 other marines were on a short leave and planned that night to, "go sow their wild oats and prove that they were men!" He went to his hotel room to change his clothes and wait for them to come get him. This is what he said,

"While resting on the bed someone or something told me to pick up a book, it was a Gideon Bible that laid on the night stand beside my bed. I opened up this wonderful Bible and began to read Luke 15: 11-32 about the Prodigal son". I realized how this story in the Bible fit my life to a tee. I went back to the first books of the New Testament and read about both the birth and life of Jesus. I read the bible verses that I remembered as a child growing up in Portland, Oregon, John 3:16 & 17 says, 'For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him will not perish but have everlasting life. 17 For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.'

Tom went on to say, "As I finished reading the passages in the Book of John, I knew I must let God into my heart and my life.

When the expected knock on the door came from my Marine buddies, I knew I must make a decision, either to stay in this room and continue reading that Gideon Bible or join my four friends and comrades in a night of drinking at the bars of Jacksonville, North Carolina.

Tom said, "My choice was to stay and continue reading the Holy Scriptures. That night I gave my life to the Lord and accepted Jesus Christ as my Savior."

Tom continued his story, "I was still reading the Gideon Bible when there was knock on the door. Two North Carolina State Highway Troopers stood at the door in the early morning dawn asking me if I knew these young men and they repeated the names of my four comrades. The Troopers asked if the four men were Marines." I said, "They are Marines and I do know them."

I asked troopers why they were asking about my Marine buddies. Then I asked the hardest questions I would ever ask, "Are my friends okay?"

All the time hoping my friends had gotten themselves arrested for being drunk and disorderly. The state Trooper said, "They were involved in a single car crash. Three of your friends were killed outright and the fourth died on the way to the hospital. They're all dead."

As we read the Bible and listen to it, we may not be sparred as drastically as Tom but this is why we want to apply it.

This was taken from http://stjamesaz.org/clientimages/36832/sermons/sermon_4-5-08.doc

Conclusion

The Bible has guided 10's of Billions of people. We have seen how it is reliable, inspired by God and a book that should be part of your daily life. The bottom line is that scripture should always bring us in deeper relationship with God, and it is infallible. I mean who really cares about learning to study the Bible if you are not going to use it as the gold standard to which everything else is compared and seen.

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Did you hear that? We want to learn and know the Bible so we can use that knowledge to know God and see all of life's events through the Bible filter. (As an awesome by-product, if you really learn to study the Bible, when and if you get married, couples that study the Bible together more than 10 minutes 4 times a week have a 1/1000 divorce rate.) We have talked about a framework of how to study the Bible. That frame work consists of understanding the context of a passage, finding out what it meant through hermeneutics and then figuring out how what it means for us today through exegesis. To some of you this may seem like a lot of information. But I am not treating you like a kid but like a young adult who can handle this information. You know our parents taught us to NOT take food from strangers. But many times in our spiritual lives we will have a need and are willing to take answers from strange people we do not know without consulting the Bible. You can avoid that if you internalize this information. "God's word is a lamp unto your feet and light unto your path."